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✓ Foster

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LECTURES

DELIVERED AT BROADMEAD CHAPEL, BRISTOL,

BY JOHN FOSTER.

Second Series.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN preparing this volume for the press, the Editor has faithfully adhered, as he did in the former series, to the original manuscripts, and permitted himself to make simply those slight additions which were necessary to remove from the composition the appearance of detached hints : persons who are familiar with Mr. Foster's writings, will not fail to recognize, even in these unfinished remains, one of their characteristic excellences—a linked consecutive-ness of the thoughts.

The first fifteen lectures are arranged according to their dates ; the others were delivered at various intervals, but all of them, it is believed, before the commencement of the year 1826. Two (the twenty-seventh and thirtieth), it will be perceived, do not

belong to the series of lectures, but were discourses prepared for special occasions, as was the case also with the thirty-first. They bear, however, so small a proportion to the rest, and are so similar in their general structure, that it has not appeared needful, on account of their insertion, to alter the title of the volume. The last lecture (*"On Access to God,"*) had the advantage of being revised for the press by Mr. Foster himself, for the use of the Religious Tract Society, and is here reprinted with the consent of the Committee.

J. E. R.

Northampton, March 11, 1847.

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 ERRATA.

Page 28, l. 7, *for scene read sense.*

Page 37, l. 7, *for perserves read preserves.*

Page 70, l. 8, *for flush read flash.*

Page 92, l. 18, *for Indians, Pagans read Indian pagans.*

Page 206, l. 9, *for as piercing read aspiring.*

LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

THE HISTORY OF JONAH.

JONAH i.—iv.

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish,” &c.

A PART of the history of the prophet Jonah has just been read. It should, surely, be very possible to raise from this narrative a few observations tending to instruction, while adapted, also, to introduce some variety into the course of our religious exercises and subjects. And the rather would we do this, from the consideration, that this piece of sacred history has been, to irreligious men of wit, and of no wit, a favourite resource for malicious jests and profane amusement. Nor are we the less disposed to do this, from having observed, that some pretended Divines have betrayed something very like a feeling of being half-sorry and half-ashamed that there is such a history in the Bible; men who are anxious to be able

to account for every strange thing by a natural cause, and terrified at the spectacle of a prodigious miracle ; —who would say, “ Yes, we believe in miracles ; we build upon them ; but there are some things so startling, so very far from the natural course of things, that we almost wish we were not required to believe them.”

Jonah is justly no great favourite with us, though conspicuously a prophet of the Lord. Hardly one prophet's name is pronounced with so little respect. We should have been ready to presume, that the persons whom the Almighty would have chosen for prophets, should have been men of the most eminent piety and excellence. And in fact, this does appear to have been the general rule. But there are recorded exceptions—such as Balaam, and the prophet who deceived the other prophet, whom a lion destroyed, (1 Kings xiii.) Jonah is not an exception in the same degree. He was a real saint, with too much of the remaining elements of a sinner. In a former part of the Old Testament (2 Kings xiv. 25) he is spoken of in terms which would not have applied to a man who had not somewhat of the true spirit in him. His first commission was to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, an immense city, and therefore a wicked one. His conduct on receiving the commission does appear very strange. But for the mention of his having acted as a prophet before, we should have concluded that this must be the first time, and that he was surprised and amazed, as by some alarming and calamitous visitation. But the vocation was not new to him ; he felt therefore no

affright as at a portentous novelty. We might have attributed terror of another kind,—the dread of attacking, singly, a great wicked city, like leaping into a gulf of destruction. Even in that case, however, was there less to be dreaded from disobeying God? We are reduced at last to accept, unwillingly, his own explanation, given in the beginning of ch. iv. “I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil;” which seems to amount to this,—he felt in danger of being disgraced as a prophet, the denunciation being to be uttered in positive, not conditional, terms. How abominably considerations of *self* may interfere with obedience to God! He determines to flee to Tarshish, that is, Tarsus in Cilicia, a place more than one hundred leagues to the north of Joppa, completely across the Mediterranean, where Paul was to be born, a man of another spirit. How *he* would have acted!

But then, the purpose of this voyage — “*to flee from the presence of the Lord.*” This betrays a most unworthy conception of the Divine Being, whatever was exactly the prophet’s notion. Some have asserted that Jonah could be little better than a kind of heathen worshipper of the true God; — that his idea of God was very much that of a local deity, in partial conformity to the absolute paganism which is believed to have much prevailed in the part of Judea where he dwelt. It has even been asserted as probable, that, at Joppa, he might formally commit himself to

the protection of the deity worshipped in that place, and in many others in the east, a god or goddess in the form of a great fish. But surely this is going a great deal too far, for a man who had previously sustained the character of a prophet of the Lord ; considering also his subsequent expressions.

Still it is too probable (for the Jews, except the most illuminated, were most wretched theologists) that he was under the influence of a notion, that God maintained a peculiar jurisdiction over Judea, and a less absolute one beyond ; though he knew that it must extend with awful authority at least to Nineveh. We are indeed forced to suppose something of this in explanation. And this heathen admixture in his ideas would favour the notion which was probably the prevailing one in his mind, namely, that if he went but far enough away, God would do without him, — would choose, on the spot, other ways and agents for his purposes respecting Nineveh — “There will be no need of *me* in the case” — “He will not follow me over the sea.”

He embarked ; with what feelings ? His commission lay upon him as guilt ! He longed for an auspicious gale, to carry him to a distance, as he hoped, from the peculiar province of God’s dominion ! so that he might say, “Happily here is less — and less — of the Divine Presence !” But what Providence did he invoke ? Would he go unprotected over seas, and to strange lands, contented with some secondary and dubious providence ? In what terms did he pray before he went to sleep ? Like other men, when conscious they are going about something

wrong, he could not pray. And supposing there were some one devout Israelite there, that did pray in his hearing, *he* could not say “Amen!”

He slept; but it is not wise to sleep in guilt. How did he deserve to be awaked? He shall not sleep long; for there is a Power that can awake the tempest! The God that is disobeyed on the land, can make the sea avenge him. And here, again, the very first thing is a pointed, direct, infliction on his conscience—for it is a summons to pray; “Awake, and call upon thy God!” And to think! that a prophet of the Lord should be the only one in the company that could not, dared not, do this! Observe, there is no situation more pitiable than that of a religious man who has disabled himself to take the benefit of his religion. His associates had various gods; but they could all pray earnestly to their objects of adoration. He could not; he who knew the real Lord of the land and the ocean.

There must soon have been manifested some peculiarity of circumstances in the storm, indicating that it was of a nature extraordinary and judicial. Superstition indeed easily fancies such a thing; but here it was not superstition. Conjectures are useless as to what circumstances. Observe; religion, even in its rudest forms, has always been faithful to its general principle thus far, that when the anger of the Divinity has been apprehended, it has been understood to be against sins and crimes;—and thus far also, that the Divinity was believed to know *who* was the criminal. The mariners, therefore, referred it to the avenging Power to point out the criminal, by

“ *casting lots* ; ” this was a common ancient practice ; a reference not to chance, but to a superior intelligence. Could our prophet feel any doubt where the lot would fall ? No ; his conscience must here have been a *prophet* to *him*.

There follows, the account of the questions and expostulations to him. His answers were perfectly explicit. And if there had been, before, any cloud and mist of paganism hanging over his ideas of God, the storm seems to have dispelled it ; for he speaks of God in the great and comprehensive terms appropriate to him. The mariners were terrified the more. For one thing, their conviction was now rendered absolute, that the tempest really was preternatural and vindictive. And also, whatever various gods they might acknowledge, they felt that they were now abandoned to the power of *One*. Did not Jonah wish himself in Nineveh, even with the wicked inhabitants in an angry or scornful tumult round him, rather than surrounded by these raging billows ? The rage of the people, God might have quelled ; the tumult of the waves, it was God that excited. And then, contrast the internal conscience in the one case, and in the other !

The perfect honesty shown by Jonah made the mariners think it best to inquire of himself what they should do to him. And his ready explicit answer, and self-devotement, no doubt, made them much more reluctant to do what he directed them. It would strike them as generous and heroic. And they, on their part, displayed much of that courageous generosity which is, at this day, so

conspicuous in men of their vocation. They could not doubt of what he assured them of; but they persisted to labour and struggle: they "*rowed hard.*"

The necessity became imperative at length. And we can imagine the prophet telling them that their labour was in vain,—himself reduced to a fixed calmness under the evident hand of God. At the same time, it was not for himself to execute the righteous doom. The mariners would not execute it, even in the extremity of their peril, without first solemnly imploring that they might be acquitted of guilt in doing it. "*We beseech thee, lay not upon us innocent blood.*" It would seem as if some new light respecting the true Divinity had broken in upon their minds through the strange and tremendous circumstances. They address the Almighty not as Jonah's God in particular.

They had now to offer their sacrifice, and in such an act would for a moment be insensible to the storm. But it was a *willing* sacrifice like that of Him, of whom Jonah was a type. They offered it—and the storm was gone! The effect upon them appears to have been, that they became genuine converts to the worship of the Almighty. And it is very reasonable to suppose that a great and useful impression might have been made on the people of Joppa. This would be confirmed, supposing Jonah, as it is not improbable, to be cast back in their neighbourhood. And if so, an important incidental use was by Providence made of the disobedience of Jonah.

But where was *he*, while these circumstances were

exciting conversation and wonder? There was to appear, very shortly, a prophet of the Lord in Nineveh. Whence to come? Where was his place of abode, at a point of time a few weeks before his arrival? The conjectures of millions would have been in vain. "The man" (it might have been told the Ninevites) "that shall denounce the divine judgments in your streets not many days hence, is not in the earth, nor the air, nor the sky, nor on the sea; yet you will most certainly see and hear him." The predicament is nearly as strange, as if he were yet a mass of clay, to be suddenly formed into a man. It might seem as if the Almighty had invented a predicament of things expressly in contempt of the vain and impious philosophy which will insist that all things in the creation shall proceed with an invariable regularity, and quiet uniformity. As if he had said, "The course of things which they require to be so uniform, shall, when I please, start out into the strangest conceivable deviations. An ass shall speak and reprove a wicked prophet; and a fish shall swallow and disgorge alive a disobedient one. And if they then will presume to deny the attested facts, and even ridicule them, let them '*sport themselves with their own deceivings!*'"

"*Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah,*" (chap. i. 17.) It has been often enough observed, that the species of this fish is altogether uncertain. There even might have been at that period of time sea-monsters which exist not now, as anciently there were enormous animals on the land, of a kind now no more. The one in question came to

be considered as having been a whale, just because that is the largest known fish, (sometimes more than a hundred feet long.) And the cavillers have been determined that it should be a whale, and no other—for a good reason, namely, that the whale's throat is found to be very strait, for an animal of such a size, and therefore the scriptural account involves a physical impossibility! Now we must not imagine we honour God by asserting a plain mathematical contradiction, and then protecting the absurdity by calling it a miracle. One has heard of a good man's uttering so silly a thing as that if God had declared that Jonah swallowed the whale, he would believe it, for that God's testimony must bear down all objections. The folly is in supposing it possible for God to have declared any such thing, that the less may contain the greater. The same contradiction would there be in asserting that Jonah went through the throat of the whale, *if* the whale's throat (of three or four inches in diameter when *dead*) were of the consistence of a tube of iron or stone. But it has been justly observed, that it is idle to assert anything as to the possible capacity of the throat of the *living* fish, from its dimensions after death. (The *boa-constrictor* is capable of swallowing animals of great size; and even men have been found in large sharks.) The fish, then, might be a whale, that swallowed Jonah; and nothing, neither, of miracle is supposed, thus far; the miracle comes afterwards. Jonah lived the duration of several days and nights in the stomach of the sea-monster without breathing, and that not in a state of suspended animation, but, it appears, in

a state to be able to reflect and pray. Here we rest plainly and simply on *miracle*,—the exertion of a divine power, which preserved the vital economy safe and at ease, under the suspension of one of its grand functions ; though not more out of ordinary nature than that suspension of another law of life, by which Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, fasted forty days. It is at the same time worth while to mention, what men of science have asserted, with examples from fact—namely, the possibility of a circulation of the blood without any breathing, or dependence on the lungs at all, from the continued communication with the heart of a certain blood-vessel which almost always ceases that communication at the very beginning of infancy ; a most extremely rare case they state, but of which there have been instances in persons who consequently could not die by suffocation. Now Jonah might be selected as having this signal peculiarity. This might serve to quash some scoffs of infidels. But, Christians do not at all need such a supposition. As to Jonah's suffering no harm from the digestive power of the sea-monster, how should he, if what Hunter and others have asserted, be true,—that the stomach has no power at all to act on a *living* substance ?

Think now of the prophet in his living tomb ! “ *The belly of hell,*” that is, the grave ! Short of death, is it possible to conceive so strange a transition of state and feelings ? A few hours since, he was at Joppa, intending, and eager, for Tarshish ; where now ? and where next ? Whither *has* he fled to, “ *from the presence of the Lord ?* ” His voyage has sped indeed ! and in a manner which

he would not have believed an angel from heaven foretelling to him ! This was something that left all wonders and adventures of mariners behind ! This was truly to be thrown on a *terra incognita*,—to discover a place never found before. God had more places to send him to than Nineveh ; and he found that God absolutely would choose whither he should go. He himself had wilfully prepared for a distant port, but another will had prepared "*the great fish*." We may suppose an utter confusion of all thought at first ;—an indistinct consciousness of something between life and death ;—taken as out of the world, —yet not into another. Perhaps a kind of desperate horror next ; the agony of a man that cannot live, nor die. But by degrees the amazing fact, that he did really live, and continue to live, would bring him to the distinct sense of a miraculous and protective Providence over him. Every moment would add strength to his impression of the divine Presence ; and he came at length to a state of thought, and faith, and hope, capable of prayer.

(Ch. ii.) From how many unthought of, unimaginable situations the Sovereign of the world has drawn devotional aspirations ! but never, except once, from a situation like this ! What is here given as the prophet's "*prayer*," is doubtless the brief recollection, afterwards recorded, of the kind of thoughts which had filled his mind during his dark sojourn ; with the addition of some pious and grateful sentiments caused by the review. This devotional composition gives by much the most favourable view of his character. It makes us regret that he could not be

so good a man on the surface of the earth, as in the depths of the ocean. In order to pray in the best manner, he must be unable to see, or move, or breathe. The final result, no doubt, of these mental exercises, was, a full consent of his will, that He who had sent him hither should send him anywhere else he pleased, even to Nineveh. And then the sea-monster had to finish *his* office by discharging the prophet on the shore, most likely near Joppa, after three days and three nights, during which the earth and heaven had been concealed from him by such a veil as never was drawn before any other eyes!

It is to be noted that our Lord declares all this to have been a type of Him, (Matt. xii. 40.) We may trace the analogy in the being consigned to the deep, and to the grave, in order that others might be saved ;—the duration of time the same in the dark retirement ;—the coming to light and life again, for the reformation of mankind. This citation in the New Testament is an authentication of the wonderful history. It may not, perhaps, be impertinent to mention a pagan authentication ;—Hercules was fabled to have had the same three days in a fish.

We shall just follow Jonah to Nineveh, where we must leave him. Surely, his recollections, during the journey, would be most vivid. The image of "*the great fish*" would be predominant above those of all the objects that passed before his eyes. He came to the great city, described as having been more than fifty miles in circuit, and which may be calculated to have contained more than half a million of people. Nineveh was at a great distance from the scene of

the wonderful facts, and we do not know whether Jonah carried with him thither any witnesses or evidences, of what had befallen him on that city's account.

That he should, would seem a thing of great importance to his success, at least to his gaining the people's attention. For it does not appear that he showed any "*signs and wonders*" in Nineveh. But even were it so, we are still in the train of miracle ; a moral miracle being required to account for so unparalleled a success. For what could be more inadequate as a cause, than the appearance and proclaimed denunciation, of this unconciliating stranger, when we consider, that he addressed a proud monarch — a corrupt profligate nobility — and hundreds of thousands of ignorant, wicked, and idolatrous people ? Yet there was a speedy, general, humiliation, under the displeasure of a God, of whom they could have known little or nothing before. And whatever deficiency of enlightened understanding there might be in this humiliation, there was more in it than outward show, — than mere sackcloth and ashes ; — for God would not be mocked. How long this great effect might continue, we are not informed. But for the present, it was such that "*God repented him*" of the intended evil ; an expression accommodated to human notions and language. There was a mighty change in the aspect of this vast and proud city ; to many eyes it would have appeared a change for the worse. Suppose there were ambassadors there from some of the magnificent monarchies of the east, they might think the city miserably degraded, in

comparison with its previous splendid and gay condition,—the brilliancy of the palace and court,—the array of guards and legions,—the gay processions and amusements, theatres, &c. But *then* the divine wrath hovered over it; *now* the divine clemency shines on it!

To Jonah all this ought to have been a delightful spectacle; but we have to deplore and hate his most perverse temper. Instead of aiding and instructing the people in their repentance, he made him a booth outside of the city and waited to see its fate, but strongly apprehending that he was now to be exposed for—as he would name it—a false prophet. It is very probable, too, (as commentators have observed) that there was something of narrow, proud, and malevolent patriotism in the case. Just now was the right moment,—he might think,—for blotting a proud, mighty, hostile, heathen power, from the face of the earth. And why should not the God of the Jews do it? do it in favour of the Jews, who had a claim to be paramount and supreme on the earth. We will not attempt to excuse him by observing how much of this spirit (and a spirit highly extolled) has prevailed among even Christian nations toward one another.

The direction the affair was taking displeased Jonah exceedingly—so as to move him to a murmuring and angry prayer even for death; yes, for death!—but he was not well prepared yet to mingle with those spirits among whom “*there is joy over one sinner that repenteth.*” And how he failed, in this point, to be a type of Him that wept at the sight

of Jerusalem ! It was well for Jonah that his prayer for death was not then granted. He so recoiled from men, as to sympathize rather with the dying gourd. Most wonderful condescension was displayed in the expostulations of God with him ! Well may we take the words of David, and say, "*Let us fall into the hands of God, rather than of men, for great are his mercies.*" The history closes upon Jonah in this unhappy temper. We will hope that he retired to practise the lesson taught him by the Ninevites—and to experience the same divine mercy.

The general lesson to us, from the whole, ought to be, that of the necessity—the inexpressibly urgent necessity—of a constant discipline of the divine Spirit, to break down all our rebellious dispositions towards God,—to constrain us, by an almighty force of grace, to an entire submission, and a cheerful obedience ;—a cheerful obedience, especially, in the promotion of God's beneficent purposes.

November 14, 1822.

LECTURE II.

THE CONTEMPLATION OF HUMAN LIFE.

ECCLESIASTES viii. 9.

"I applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun."

THE writer of these words means, by "applying his heart," the exercise of his attention and his judgment. He observed, thought, and formed opinions on the works of men, spread over the earth. If we did not know who says it, a kind of question might arise—the man that could speculate so widely, could he have much on his hands of practical business? He had the affairs of a kingdom to manage.

There is no reason why a practical man should not be also an observant and thinking man. There are numerous reasons why he should be so. And if he be such, and that too, under divine instruction, he may be the wiser man for being involved in the active business of the world.

"Every work that is done under the sun." There is one Being, and only one that can observe and judge literally *"every work."* The wise man means—works of all kinds, that came within his view. He

was a general observer, with an exercise of his judgment.

We have taken this passage as an introduction to a few observations on a topic of considerable interest. We are placed in a very busy world, full of "*works*," transactions, events, varieties of human character and action. We witness them—hear of them—think of them—talk of them. Now, it is a matter of great importance that we should do this wisely, so as to turn these things to a profitable account. Do it, in one manner or another, we certainly shall. We shall, indeed, all acknowledge the duty, to every one, of minding his own business. But very few will be disposed to circumscribe that duty, so as to preclude a great deal of attention to what the rest of mankind are doing. There may be a very few (here and there one) that do endeavour to limit the sphere of their attention by a very strict and narrow boundary. They have a stress of care and employment immediately and constantly upon them; and of a nature not much spreading out into connexions with the surrounding world. And they are naturally not inquisitive. They willingly, therefore, keep their attention closed in, and occupied on strictly their own business. We mean not to censure this, except as an extreme.

There is another class, formerly more numerous, that may be called pious recluses; persons who are not pressed and harassed by the exactions of worldly business, and of a retired, devout, and meditative spirit. They feel that much looking on the world would disturb and distract the calm tenor of their

thoughts and affections. They feel as if their spirits could not ascend toward heaven, but by being drawn in from the earth. They endeavour to forget the world, in order to be exempt from its evil influences, and to be the more devoted to its Lord. They have found, they say, that the world can do *them* no good, and they can do *it* none, except by their prayers. Neither on this class do we wish to pronounce a censure, excepting in particular instances. There have been instances in which such a mode of life has been a mistake and a desertion of duty. There was in the century before last, a very remarkable man of the name of Nicholas Ferrar, the account of whose life one has never recollected without regret, and a degree of indignation.

But, we repeat, there is little danger now, of men's becoming recluses, ascetics, devotees ;—voluntarily and systematically secluded from all attention to, and communication with, the active scenes of the world. For one thing, in this age, men's own concerns—really and strictly their own—are becoming more implicated with the transactions of the wide, busy world. In the case of perhaps thousands of men in this country, their immediate interests—their proceedings—even their duty—are sensibly affected by what may be doing on the other side of the globe,—in South America, or in Spain, Italy, Constantinople. The movements in such remote scenes send an effect like the far-extending tremulations of an earthquake, which comes under the house, the business, the property, of men even here.

It is, besides, most obvious that the world is

becoming a far more active, agitated, changing, tumultuous scene than formerly. Men are forced to feel the evidence and effect of this ; it comes upon them with an inundation of intelligence, events, omens, and alarms. And, withal, the pervading, connecting principle of *community*, throughout mankind, as one immense body, has become much more alive. It is becoming much more verified to *be* one body, however extended, by the quicker, stronger sensation which pervades the rest of it, from what affects any part. There is indeed, much of diseased and irritable sensibility ; it is as if the parts were a grievance to one another, and would quarrel ; as if, like the hyena at Paris, the great animal would devour one of its own limbs. But still the great body is much more sensibly made to feel that it has its existence in all its parts.

A more pleasing circumstance of this enlarging sense of community, is,—that benevolence, and especially Christian benevolence, is now prosecuting its operations, not only with far greater activity and multiplicity of efforts, but on a far wider plan. Thus, the religious interests, thoughts, and discourse of private individuals, are drawn out into some connection, almost whether they will or not, with numerous proceedings and occurrences, both at home and far off. From all this, and many more considerations which might be added, it is certain enough, that we shall not be disposed to confine our thinking and conversation to our own concerns in a very strict sense. It may be added that the Holy Scriptures plainly encourage an exercise of thoughtful attention

on the actions and characters of men, and the course of the world's events.

But now comes the question, as to the proper manner of doing this, so that it may really be beneficial.

In the first place ; if this attention to the actions and events of the world, be employed merely in the way of amusement, there will be little good. It is so with many. They have no fixed, serious, interest and purpose, to occupy their minds ; no grand home-business, within their own spirits. Yet they must have something to keep their faculties in a pleasant activity, or call it *play*. The mind, therefore, flies out as naturally and eagerly as a bird would from an opened cage. The attention rambles hither and thither, with light momentary notices of things ; great and small ;—here, there, or yonder ; it is all one ; “welcome !” and “begone !” to each in turn. Great and small, when mere amusement is the object, are made equal in one respect ; namely, that no solid good is exacted or drawn from *any* of them. What is sought of them is, to keep the mind agreeably in motion, and prevent that most unpleasant circumstance,—not to say frightful one, that the thoughts should come gravely home upon the soul itself ; or, to prevent an utter stagnation of existence. A part of this vain disposition is, the eagerness for novelty, merely as such. Anything new, no matter what. This is a practical confession, “I have obtained no substantial abiding good from the ten thousand things that I have transiently noticed before.” Like the condition of a man who looks along a great variety

of fruit-trees, but may eat of none. When he is to do no more than look at them, his eye will quickly pass on to another and another. Now, how useless is such a manner of “applying the heart !”

But there may be another manner much worse than useless. For attention may be exercised on the actions, characters, and events among mankind, in the direct service of the evil passions ; in the disposition of a savage beast, or an evil spirit ; in a keen watchfulness to descry weakness, in order to make a prey of it :—in an attentive observation of mistake, ignorance, carelessness, or untoward accidents,—in order to seize, with remorseless selfishness, unjust advantages ;—in a penetrating inquisition into men’s conduct and character, in order to blast them ; or (in a lighter mood) to turn them indiscriminately to ridicule. Or there may be such an exercise, in the temper of envy, jealousy, or revenge ; or (somewhat more excusably, but still mischievously) for the purpose of exalting the observer in his own estimation.

But, there would be no end of describing the useless and pernicious modes of doing that which our text expresses. Let us try to form some notion of what would be the right one. In doing so there is one most important consideration to be kept in mind ; that is,—the necessity of having just principles or rules, to be applied in our observation of the world. The principles will be applied continually ; and therefore, a few unsound ones may soon produce a thousand wrong judgments. And all these, in return, confirm the principles wrong. To have them

first formed right, therefore, and always kept true, is of the utmost consequence. And in this matter, the most fatal error is, to take from the world itself our principles for judging of the world. They must be taken absolutely from the divine authority, and always kept true to the dictates of that. For nothing can be more absurd (not to say pernicious) than to have a set of rules different from His. Therefore, it is as in the temple, and at the oracle, of God, that the principles are to be received and fixed, to go out with for judging of what we behold. And a frequent recourse must be had thither, to confirm and keep them pure. The principles are thus to be something independent, and as it were sovereign above that which they are to be applied to.

But instead of this, a great part of mankind let their principles for judging be formed by that world itself which they are to observe and judge. See the consequence. They have, for judging by, a whole set of apprehensions, notions, maxims, moral and religious, not at all identical with the divine dictates. Therefore, not through any virtue of candour or charity, but through false principles, they perceive but little evil, (sin, folly,) in many of "*the works done*," which the high and pure authority condemns. They do not see the beam of "*fiery indignation*" which, from heaven, strikes here and there; they do not see, shrivelled into insignificance, many things which the world accounts most important. It does not come full out to their sight how far the actions of men agree or not agree, with their awful future prospects. Instead of taking a light from the Sanctuary, they

accept the light which the world itself chooses to throw over its system of actions. The world has sent "*a lying spirit*" through their judgments. In plain words, it is not manifest to them how all this appears in the sight of God. And consequently, when the unqualified dictates of religion are enounced, respecting this and the other class of human actions, it strikes them as a very strange voice. Now, how evident it is, that a man thus pre-occupied and satisfied with the world's own principles, can to no good purpose "*apply his heart*" to observe and judge.

There must, then, be a set of sacred principles taken from another quarter. With the aid of these, we are to look on this busy mingled scene of all kinds of actions and events. And we might specify two or three chief points of view, or general references, in which we should exercise this attention and judgment. And, the grand primary reference with which we survey the world of human action, should be, to God; we should not be in this respect, "*without God in the world.*" We are exercising our little faculty on the scene; let us recollect ONE, whose intelligence pervades it all, and is perfect in every point of it! Think what a compass of vision, and how much more he sees than we do, in any one act or incident on which our utmost attention may be fixed. To us there is an unknown part in every action. Our attention leaves one acting mortal, to fix on another; *He* continues to observe every one and all.

Let us think, again, while we are judging *He* is judging! "There is at this instant, a perfected estimate in an Unseen Mind, of this that I am

thinking how to estimate!—if that judgment could lighten on me, and on its subject—!” Our minds also should be habituated, in looking at this world of actions, to recognize the divine government over it all; to reflect that there is one sovereign, comprehensive scheme, proceeding on, to which they are all in subordination; how few of them so *intended*, but all so, in *effect*. Sometimes, in particular parts and instances, we can see how human actions in their confused mass or series, have been compelled into a process which results in what human wisdom could never have predicted. And what an immensity of them is God compelling at this very hour! In our conscious feebleness of intelligence, it is striking to look at actions, and wonder what purpose of his he can make those conduce to—and those. Look at the vast world of them; see what kind they are; and then think what HE must be, that can control them all to his supreme purpose! Yet there are some parts of the view in which the proceeding of divine Providence is conspicuous and intelligible. We see *how* sin is made its own plague, even in this life; and *how*,—by what law,—“holiness to the Lord” contains the living principle of happiness. And also, *how* some of the transactions and events in the world are tending to certain grand results which God has avowed to be in his purpose. Now to contemplate the scene of human action, without any such reference to the Almighty,—would it not be to lose a most important part of the benefit which may be gained from the contemplation?

Again;—our exercise of observation and judg-

ment on men's actions should have a reference to the object of forming *a true estimate of human nature*. How idle to be indulging in speculative and visionary theories about this, in the midst of a world of facts! Take one of these theories into the actual world, and see how it will turn to smoke and dust. Look at the general qualities of actions over this wide world, and think what they collectively testify of *man*! And in noticing men's actions in the detail, it will be a useful exercise and habit to trace them back to what they proceed from in the nature of man; and what they therefore show to be in that nature. Human nature discloses itself freely, fully, fearlessly, in some men; with caution, art, and partial concealment in others. But a multitude of unequivocal manifestations, of all its attributes, will present themselves to the attentive observer. It is of course that he ought to maintain candour, or rather say, *equity*; but he is not to let go the plain maxim that the fruits show the tree.

In connection with this we may add,—that the observant judgment of the actions of mankind should have some reference to *the illustration and confirmation of religious truths*. These truths may thus be embodied, as it were, in a substantial form of evidence and importance. We may just name, for instance, the doctrine of the fall and the depravity of man. Look, and impartially judge, whether “the works done under the sun” afford any evidence on that subject! The necessity of the conversion of the soul. For whence does all the evil in action come from? Is the heart becoming drained into purity by so much evil having come from it? Alas! there is a

perennial fountain, unless a divine hand close it. We may name the doctrine of a great intermediate appointment for the pardon of sin,—its pardon through a propitiation, an atonement. We look at the life of a sinner, a numerous train of sins. Think intently on the malignant nature of sin ; and, if there be truth in God, it is inexpressibly odious to him ;—then if, nevertheless, such sinners are to be pardoned, does it not eminently comport with the divine holiness—is it not due to it—that in the very medium of their pardon, there should be some signal and awful fact of a judicial and penal kind, to record and render memorable for ever a righteous God's judgment, estimate, of *that* which he pardons ? The necessity of the operating influence of a divine Spirit is also illustrated.

A faithful corrective *reference to ourselves* in our observation of others, is a point of duty almost too plain to need mentioning. The *observation* should constantly turn into *reflection*, which yet it is very unapt to do, except when self-complacency can be gratified. But what a miserable speculation for profit it will be, if we do this just so far as will please us,—and omit to do it in the numberless instances in which it might admonish and correct us. But, to make this better use habitually, will require such a measure of resolution, as will amaze a man who has not tried and shall begin to try. Philosophers tell us of two forces in nature,—one that draws things towards the centre, another that repels them from it. A reflective man may perceive that his heart has the one of these forces, for what would flatter him

and do him mischief, in the consideration of the actions of his fellow mortals ; and the other, for what would reprove, warn, and profit him. But really he had better endeavour to draw in his attention from the scene of human actions, till he can learn the wisdom and the art to derive aids to self-correction from the view. And he may be sure that art is worth learning, by which he may *make every man his instructor*. The particular rules and methods for this would admit of extensive illustration, for which there is no time at present. It may, as a distinct specific topic, be worth our consideration at a future hour ; for the present discourse has been of too general a scope.

Might we suggest one other point of reference, in our looking on the actions of men, namely the comparison and the difference between what men are doing “under the sun,” and what they will all, ere long, be doing *somewhere else*? *Ere long*, we say ; for on plain scriptural grounds (not to advert to others) we believe that men will pass immediately at death into a state of great activity ; though the contrary doctrine might be welcome to those who end the course of their terrestrial actions ill. But think of the comparison suggested. Very many human agents, have, within our knowledge, left this scene of action. We can recall them to thought individually ; we observed their actions. How have they been employed since ? The triflers, how ? The active enemies of God, how ? The servants of Christ, how ? We cannot very formally represent to ourselves how ; but it is interesting to look into that

solemn obscurity—to think of it. Think of all that have done all “the works under the sun,” ever since that luminary began to shine on this world,—now in action in some other regions! Think of all those whose actions we have beheld and judged,—those recently departed,—our own personal friends! Have not they a scene of amazing novelty and change; while yet there is a relation, a connecting quality between their actions *before* and *now*. If one of them could come and describe, so that we could in any adequate measure apprehend, what a complete suspension there would be for a while of our observation of what mortals are doing. The difference and comparison would dilate our faculties to the intensest wonder. But still the point of supreme emphasis would surely be, the connection between the sublunary train of action, and that which has followed; that the grand predominant thing in the subsequent economy of action (its delight or misery) is because of the quality which prevailed in their action in the previous state.

Lastly, our exercise of attention and judgment on “*every work that is done under the sun*,” should be under the habitual recollection, that soon we shall cease to look on them; and that, instead, we shall be witnessing their consequences; and in a mighty experience also, ourselves, of consequences. This thought will enforce upon us incessantly, that all our observation should be most diligently turned to the account of true wisdom, and our own highest improvement.

January 8, 1823.

LECTURE III.

PRACTICAL VIEWS OF HUMAN LIFE.

PROVERBS xxiv. 32.

“ Then I saw and considered it well ; I looked upon it, and received instruction.”

THESE sentences will seem the mere echo of the text at our last meeting, when the subject was—How to turn to profitable account our observation of the events, characters, and actions of this busy world. It were best to confess the truth, without waste of words. That discourse did not insist nearly so much as had been intended on the practical view of the subject. It extended more into the general, wide, and contemplative views of it. We hope, that, without being guilty of any material repetition, it may be possible to consider the subject with a more direct reference to some practical exemplifications, and methods for so observing this world of active beings as to gain valuable improvement by it.

And the consideration should press very forcibly on conscience, that unless we have a profitable manner of doing this, there will be a miserable, a dreadful waste of our thought, our time, and our

talking. Think of the incalculable number and series of acts of attention (to men's actions), many of them accompanied or followed by some expression in words. (*The Universal History* in sixty volumes is not so ample a series of notices of facts, as that which has been made by almost any man by the time he is far on in life.) These objects of notice, each in its succession, have occupied the attention, that is to say, the whole mind ; insomuch, that in many of the instances, nothing else was at the time attended to. And the train is going on, in close succession, and will to the end of life. Now reflect ! *if* the greater part of all this should be nearly useless—as profitless as a Hindoo devotee's repetition of certain phrases for millions of times ! But if these acts of attention are useless, they will be worse than useless. For certain dispositions and feelings usually accompany our notices of men's actions ; and improper ones will be very ready to be there, if the observation is exercised with no reference to our improvement.

It would be well, sometimes, to take somewhat of an account of what we have beneficially acquired from all this. And it is not enough to say, “ We have a great accumulation of facts deposited in the memory,”—for the most foolish and wicked man may say the same. It is not enough to say, “ We have acquired a measure of worldly prudence, caution, and address.” Very good this ; very important, for very many purposes. And indeed, this is one of the things that a man should gain. The man so instructed is a safer man ;—he has the power to be a

more useful man. But he is not necessarily a better man. Nay, in many instances we see that he is actually a worse.

In the account to be taken, the great question is,—“How much have we profited in the character of servants of God, by what we have seen of men?” How much more wise in the best sense—conscientious—apt—effectually warned? The world should be regarded as an extensive outer department of the great school of religion. In it the servant of God is to learn, through a different kind of illustration, the same things which he is taught in the inner school. Or rather say, the things which he is taught in the inner school he is to observe illustrated, exemplified, proved, and enforced, in this wide outer department. And if he do not observe to this effect, it would only show that he is but very imperfectly disciplined in the inner department; that is, in the principles of divine truth, in the religious exercises of his mind. Unless he is thus instructed and disciplined, he will be almost sure (as was noticed in the former discourse) to acquire, in this outer school, a different kind of principles from those of the inner; in many points quite opposite and pernicious ones. Proceeding in this right method, it will not be by a forced construction, by a prejudiced interpretation, that he will find the instruction presented in the outer, to the same effect as in the inner.

When the learner in God's peculiar school goes out to observe mankind, he will think of the manner, and cautions, and rules, for turning what he sees to the most beneficial account; and of the most

instructive points to fix his attention upon. And a few things general and special, may be suggested to this purpose.

An obvious one is,—let not his observing be merely of the nature of speculation ; not simply a seeing and judging what men are. This mere knowledge of mankind has seemed to be the whole object of some keen-sighted men ; and they have been prodigiously proud of possessing it. But, suppose an observer to look, most intelligently, on the human world on ever so wide a scale ; or to understand most perfectly, those within the sphere of his personal acquaintance ;—or to see, as we say, through and through, the individuals immediately about him, and even to know their whole past history in addition. Still, if merely to know that the fact is so be all—would that purify his heart or conduct ? correct a single fault of his own ? constitute him a benefactor to others ? or make him a participator of the piety and excellence which he may see in some ? Does not the great Wicked Spirit, “spying up and down,” *know* mankind incomparably better than any man ? Yet a man will assume to be an exceedingly wise man, on the strength of this knowledge ; and at the same time another sagacious observer of him can perceive that he is very ignorant of himself. Our knowledge of men must be diligently applied to a salutary use, especially for ourselves. We should be impatient to find that it is answering the most valuable end.

Another point of admonition is,—against *prejudice* and *arrogance* in observing and judging. You see

persons sometimes who really do not judge from fair and attentive observation. They have some prepossession, and everything is forced into conformity to that ; it is their rule of interpretation, by which they can easily and rapidly explain everything into confirmation, however apparently contrary. Or, even supposing them not to have a prejudice specially against an individual, they seem to have a set of judgments, estimates, shaped ready in their minds ; and upon the slightest circumstance they will instantly fix one of them on a fellow mortal. And then, so it is to be, though there were fifty things alleged to show the judgment mistaken and unjust.

We named also *arrogance* ; for there are some men, who might seem to have no other business on the earth but to inspect, arraign, and censure human creatures. They are perpetually exercising the office of inquisitors ; they assume to have an infallible insight, and perfect comprehension on all occasions ; and pronounce as if there could be no appeal. They may justly be called upon to show their high commission from heaven ; for really it might seem as if they thought men more accountable to them than to God. They may be asked, too, whether their own conduct and the divine laws are in such perfect harmony or unity, that they may be admitted as the personification of those laws ; or if not, whether they are meaning an atonement for themselves to those laws by their lofty arrogance in condemning other sinners.

Another suggestion is, against taking a pleasure in

perceiving and ascertaining what is wrong in man. This caution does not recommend any fallacious liberality (so called), by which the rules of truth and justice should be set at nought. But in human nature there is something which is capable of being gratified that there is so much folly and sin in mankind ; probably, at bottom, from some inward malice against the Supreme Holiness. One proof of the fact itself, that it is with multitudes a most favourite and never-tiring amusement, to hear, to recount, and to exhibit, the follies and sins of men. Insomuch that it is one of the strongest marks of a renovated and sanctified spirit, to be able truly to say, "I beheld transgressors and was *grieved*."

Another grand rule is :—that our observations on other men should not be directed or suffered to go to the effect of our being better pleased with ourselves ; with this exception,—that if divine grace has really wrought a good work in us, we may well be delighted with that as such. But what we point at is obvious enough,—the tendency to a gratified pride in our supposed virtues ; and to a most indulgent judgment of the things which even the grossest self-love cannot wholly approve. Consult all human nature, and each man his own heart, whether this tendency is not apt to be strengthened in looking at the world. Therefore it is requisite there be a steady and earnest counteraction. And the whole system and practice of our observation of the world should be resolutely formed on the principle, that *our own correction* is the grand object to be faithfully and constantly kept in view.

To such general considerations as these there might be added, partly in application of them, a variety of more special observations, of which we may just mention a few.

For instance ;—think of the probable difference between our judgments of the persons we look upon, and their own judgments of themselves. If they were, respectively, put in words, on confronting pages, you would expect to find a great difference. Now, which of them is right ? You answer,—“ We think we have exercised discernment, equity, and even candour, and that therefore our judgment of them is right.” But, how then, comes it to pass that theirs is so far wrong ? The cause we think quite obvious, the delusive partiality of self-love. But, now, is this just all we have to think in the case ? What ! are *we* perfectly safe against all such deception in judging of ourselves ? Our fellow mortals by no means think so of us ; and are they, in this case, necessarily mistaken ? The application of this is perfectly plain. Our seeing how they are deluded in judging of themselves, should excite us to a severe effort at truth and justice in self-judgment.

In observing mankind, we perceive, to a great extent, a sad deficiency or depravation of conscience ; what a trifle they can make of many most important discriminations between good and evil ; how easily they can neglect a duty, or go into a sin ; how little remonstrance or conflict, or subsequent remorse. From this sight should not a solemn admonition come to us ? Let us observe under what

fatal operation, by what degrees that sacred power has lost its divinity,—its rectitude,—its vigilance ; and then narrowly observe the state and action of this power in us. Remember, that it is not more the interest of enemies, military or civil, that the sentinel or watchman should sleep, than it is the interest of our spiritual enemies that conscience should. If it is calm, examine and ascertain, whether it is because the heavens are calm,—or because it can sleep in a storm. Note attentively, and beware of, what we have experienced to be seductive of its fidelity.

One of the most conspicuous things to be noticed in looking on mankind is,—how temptation operates and prevails. We may see them under every kind and process and stage of it ; a dreadful but instructive sight ! For our own safety, let us observe, how evil, to steal in, contrives to ally itself with what is good ;—how a great evil conceals itself under the appearance, and perhaps the name, of a little one ;—with what satanic craft and dexterity, temptation can fall upon critical junctures, when but a little is wanting to determine the choice this way or that ; how sometimes it insinuates, sometimes surprises ;—how it adapts itself to various dispositions and tastes ;—how there are varieties enough of evil for all of them. From all this, there should be an instructed vigilance for ourselves, and appropriate prayers.

A prominent and mournful thing to be seen in looking on mankind, will be, the great errors, the lapses, of good men. And this is a most gratifying sight to a very large proportion of men ; probably to the majority—the great majority ! Only think, what

a condition of our nature this one fact betrays. To those who feel thus, there comes an awful lesson in *this* way ; that is, what a state this feeling shows them they are in. But we would suggest an admonition to those who deplore the sight of good men falling. Reflect how unsafe any man, every man is, but as God perserves him. Perhaps these good men had been betrayed, like Peter, to trust in themselves. See what a strong and treacherous enemy there remains in the soul, to conflict with the heavenly principle imparted. "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*"

In looking on men, observe the effect of situation and circumstances. How much they form men's notions, consciences, and habits, as to good and evil ; in despite of the absolute, unalterable, and eternal principles. How men's souls and practices are surrendered to the effect of their situation. See how one situation is unfavourable to one particular Christian virtue ; another to another ; and how the majority of situations are unfavourable to a fervent, simple, Christian, piety. The instruction from this view is very direct. Partly, as to avoiding some situations, when there is a free choice ; partly, to apprise a man of the special dangers of the situation in which he is unavoidably placed. The lesson is peculiarly strong with regard to companionship, whether of choice or necessity. Look watchfully, how men are affected ; and who shall dare to say, "I have nothing to fear in a like situation ?"

Among the things observable, in looking on mankind, are many (what we deem) errors of judg-

ment—opinions. Observe how they arise, and become fixed ; the causes of perversion ;—the things that take the precedence of a real honest love of truth ;—the indirect, disingenuous, evasive reasonings ;—a man's identifying his opinions with his self-importance ;—the pride of being able to defend them ;—the absolute horror of acknowledging "I was in error !"—and at length the real incapacity of perceiving the force of anything that might correct the notions entertained.

But we should not make the whole representation, and conclude it, as if the view of the world afforded no instructions but those which are to warn and deter ; as if it presented nothing but what we are to beware of resembling. Happily there are worthier things, here and there ; exemplary virtues, graces, wisdom. And it is delightful to turn for instruction to these,—from the many things that instruct us as being evil. At the same time we may be sure that these brighter examples have derived much of their excellence from the instructions of evil ; it is the pure extract from *that*, that these present to us ; and it is a noble thing, this transmutation,—and chiefly the effect of religion. Let these better examples then be observed, with attention to understand how they are formed ; and an earnest effort of imitation ; especially such as are in situations much like our own.

Such are a few of the specimens of the kinds of instruction which observation of the world may supply, and of the manner of obtaining it. Every serious person may, for his own benefit, greatly enlarge the enumeration. And he may take a few

great principles, and apply them to all, as important means and materials of profit. But let it never be forgotten, in any part of the process, that the efficacy of the instruction must be from the Supreme Teacher; without him, the attraction and assimilation of the evil would, after all, be mightier than its warning and repelling force. To him therefore there must be a constant recourse, that he may both make the instruction true, and make it effectual. This will truly be, "*to make all things work together for their good.*" And there is something glorious in this Christian idea (and it is exclusively a Christian idea, a vain fantasy on any other principle)—the idea of passing through a world of follies and iniquities, errors and sins, the better for it all, at every stage; and of passing into the other world, the more in the image of God, the richer, the purer, the brighter, the happier, for all that naturally tended to pervert, to defile, and to destroy the soul.

January 23, 1823.

LECTURE IV.

THE VANITY OF EARTHLY GLORY.

ISAIAH x. 3.

“Where will ye leave your glory?”

THE principal word in this short question seems, by its very sound, to bring before the mind indistinctly, a vision, or image, or shadow, of something great and magnificent, yet unsubstantial, delusive, and vain. We have a certain vague sense of its associations, almost before we think of its meaning. When we bring our thoughts upon it more distinctly, we recognize it as the most conspicuous favourite term of heathenism. We do not mean that most formal and grossly shaped heathenism, commonly so denominated, existing in particular regions or ages:—but a heathenism of all times and countries; that action and passion of the human mind, by which notions and feelings of greatness, transcendent value, unlimited importance, have been attached to certain things of but imaginary worth, unsubstantial, and delusive; which things have been coveted, adored, toiled for, fought for, lived for, died for—as GLORY.

“GLORY,” therefore, has been the name of *Vanity*

turned into a god. And how wide, how vast, the dominion of this idolatrous delusion! But narrow, to this, in space or time, the mythology of Greece and Rome—or the Mohammedan imposture—or the Papal superstition. So vast is the extent, so almighty, almost, the fascination of this imposture, of Glory! But no wonder;—for it has one grand advantage over all other impostures or idolatries, namely, that it makes the man himself the Idol.

Will you carry back your imagination, a moment, into an ancient splendid temple of one of the greater deities, and consider, if it could have been a circumstance of the worship there, that the worshipper should feel the supposed attributes of the god transferred upon himself! that in his own imagination, and perhaps that of others, he should be, for the time, the Jove or Apollo; that would have been a transcendent and superlative charm of the superstition! But thus it is, in the case of the worshipper of the glory we speak of. Whatever it consists of, it must be identified with him; it must not be capable of being beheld separately from him; it must be a halo round him; a splendour spread as widely as possible, but always with a figure in the midst, and that—*himself*.

What it consists of—the world's glory—is readily apprehended. That a man be conspicuous among and above his fellow mortals;—be a more important object, as if a larger measure of being, than a number of them estimated collectively;—be much observed, admired, even envied as being that, which they cannot be;—be often in people's thoughts and in

their discourse ;—be such, that when they talk of something that is to be admired, they must talk of him, he being a prominent instance and example :—and that, conversely, his name shall be the signal for turning on the more ambitious, the finer, matters of this world's concerns. His name must be, as it were, written in pomp of gold on whatever is accounted the richest and grandest among mankind. He must be such, that to think or know but little about him, would argue an inattention, or an obscurity of situation, almost pitiable. The man of glory is to be such a one that it shall seem as if it were chiefly on his account, that many other men and things exist ; and that many shall aspire to some kind of connection with him ;—such, that what he does, or what happens to him, shall be a matter of great curiosity, sensation, discussion, opinion, widely extended report,—such, that a great change in his condition, a remarkable eclipse of his glory, or his being removed from the world, shall, for a moment, seem an important event ; while hundreds of thousands shall prosper or suffer,—shall expire and be interred,—almost without notice. He must be such, that he can raise himself, with impunity, above some of the obligations and responsibilities which are enforced on meaner mortals.

Are not such things as these the characteristics of what the world calls Glory ? With these, as its general properties, it is sought to be realized in a variety of particular forms, to some of which we shall have to advert. And in the widest difference of degrees ;—very inconsiderable men being often

intent on their glory, in their little sphere. This then, is the adored object, for which so many souls are feverishly panting ! This is what calls out the energy of all the faculties ;—what poets and orators, and the world's other oracles, have been extolling through all ages ! This is what absorbs the devotion due to God ! this is what myriads have been willing to lose their souls to obtain !

Now, while we contemplate this dire insanity,—while we behold these idolaters of glory, in pursuit or in possession, we may think of things that might be said to them. And there are questions with which they might be accosted, short of the portentous one in our text. For example ;—What you have attained of this supreme good, does it not as often make you feel what it does *not* do for you, as what it *does* for you ? What is the amount of what it does *not* do for you ? “But should it not, a thing so idolized, do this for me—and this ? What else is to do for me, that which *it* does not ? Where is the tree of life ? Where *are* the waters of life ?”

That which is the most valued in this glory,—that which is the peculiar good of it,—does it come fully into the heart ? Is it a deep, sweet, luxury there ? Is it a more delightfully animated life-blood ? Or does it obstinately remain on the outside ? (As in the northern regions, the soil is intensely frozen underneath, while the thin surface is overspread with flowers.) So that there are moments when the possessors of a large share of this glory, feel as if they could be willing to resign it all, to be really happy at heart. And in default of knowing how to

be happy, either without it or with it, what low and vulgar resources many of glory's favourites have been driven to for relief?

Ask, again,—this glory pursued, or in a measure possessed, does it not cost you dear? Intense anxieties,—privations,—self-denial,—restraints on liberty,—subjection to forms,—toil to maintain possession,—obstructed and frustrated schemes,—the pressure of all this has, sometimes, been so intolerable as to force an escape by suicide.

It may be asked once more,—your obtained share of this coveted glory—is it enough? Are you quite undisturbed at the sight of larger shares possessed by others? Does that which is not attained, and perhaps cannot be, sometimes appear more precious than what is possessed? Has it all the dazzling and commanding effect that is desired on the inferior human beings? (Haman.)

With such questions we might accost the idolaters of the glory of this world. But there remains behind, *another* question, of a more potent voice—of weightier import—“Where will ye *leave* your glory?”

What! then, it is to be *left*,—the object of all this ardour and idolatry,—all this anxiety and exertion,—all this elation and pride,—is to be left! It is, then, after all, not really united to the man. He expends the ardour of his soul to combine it with his being—to make it his very substance—but it is extraneous still! He cannot say, “all this is myself,—my vital essence is in it—and where I am it shall be.” He may have to go where it will not

accompany him. It will be found how readily the connecting principle becomes dissolved. "And was this all the hold you had upon it?"

Men must *leave* their glory. If they would but think as they look upon the things that are swelling their pride,—“this and this—is what I am to leave!—It has no one relation to me so positive as *this*—that *I shall leave it*. I feel my being standing off from it—in separation, as preparing to leave it. So near as I now am to it, I may in a moment come to behold it as at an immense distance! The most certain of all things is, that the moment will be, when I shall find that I have left it.”

And *where* will they leave their glory? Where, that it can in any sense continue to be theirs—theirs, for any beneficial or gratifying effect to them? What can they take with them, to keep them in a sensible communication with it? What sense of property in it can there be, with such a gulf between? How can its brightness pierce that great night to shine on them? Why cannot the eager pursuers, and the proud possessors, reflect, a little while, what all this will be to them, when they shall have left it!

Where will they leave it, that it shall be anything to *them* what becomes of it next? What will it be to them, how it falls to other mortals? What will it be to them, *who* rushes across their fresh grave to seize a share of it? To them the new acquirers will pay no tribute, and can do no good; but will be gratified in being free from the superstition that should offer prayers for their souls.

Where will they leave their glory, to be kept that they may obtain it again? If such an idea be pure absurdity, it must needs be a melancholy thing that it should be so. For, nothing is more mournful than parting with what is passionately loved, under a perfect certainty of possessing it no more. A man leaving what he highly values, to go on some long distant adventure, may commit it to be kept for him, and may hope to repossess it some time hereafter. The ancient Egyptians went further; expected to return, at a future age, to a life on earth,—and they committed (those who were able) their glory to magnificent and imperishable tombs, to preserve and certify their claim to repossess their “glory,” when they should return,—and to be representative of it meanwhile. But there is no such flattering delusion now, to console the idolaters of glory when they are leaving it. A body, indeed, they will leave, in the chambers of death, to be kept for them to recover; but at that day, when they come to repossess it—where will be the “glory?” They will remember it; but will they look around to find it? *then*, when the whole terrestrial economy is closing—the judgment imminently at hand—the world going to be on fire? What sad and bitter emphasis there is in the question, then, “Where will ye leave your glory?”

As the concluding part of these meditations, let us briefly apply them to several of the kinds,—the forms—of this world’s glory; the particular things in which men aspire to find it, or deem that they have it. What those things are, is plain to every

eye ; and rendered the more conspicuous, by their forming one side of a dreadful alternative. For there is presented, a Christian, a heavenly, an eternal glory. When the lovers of glory are invited to this, and scorn it, and reject it,—that which they reject it *for*, is the more palpably and glaringly exposed to your attention. *This* they throw away ! *what* is it then that they take ?

The most common form of the idolized thing is—what may be called the material splendour of life ;—that which immediately strikes the senses ;—things which are the apparent signs of wealth,—though sometimes most foolishly attempted to be displayed without it. Fine or magnificent places of abode, sumptuously furnished and decorated ;—many officious attendants at command ;—splendid equipage ;—costly or showy personal attire ; all this in many different degrees, according to its practicability, (the ambition of it being felt far down in the gradation of condition.) Now to think ! that tens of thousands of immortal beings in our land are set upon such things as these, with all the passion and ardour of their souls ! But, they must leave their glory !

It might seem as if all this should surely be an adjustment to detain them indefinitely here. Surely they are combining themselves with it in order to stay with it ! they cannot be passionately labouring at all this as a thing to be left ! Yes ; they and this are separable with infinite facility, and are separating. They often, perhaps, look at the mansion they dwell in with pride. Let them look once more, to think how long it may probably stand ! And there is again

the question. "How long?" in another application. How easily their thoughts might dart on to the time when they will be there no more. By their equipments, they carry a marked and superior appearance, where they go, and in society. Let them think,—the same kind of appearance will be, when lookers-on will observe, that *they* (naming them) are wanting.

Even as to the circumstance of rich, gay, or splendid personal attire—they look in the mirror, and at length—"It is well!" Just as they are about to go forth to display this for effect, let them turn, and look once more, and say,—“Here are these elegances, these fair ornaments, and here this dying frame. Here probably are some things that I shall leave; and how probable it is, that some of these things will retain their lustre and their colour, when this body—is what? is where?”—Let them think where they will leave such glory;—or would they rather take it with them?

Such displays are considered as belonging to wealth, and as made partly for the purpose of proclaiming it. But there are a few persons whose glory is in riches simply, and without its ostentatious pomps. In some rare instances they are quite satisfied with the consciousness of possessing their idol, without the fame of it; but excepting these very few, it is felt essential that it should be known, though no expenditure in either pomp or charity proclaim it. Well, they too must leave their glory. "Where?" where? why to the curses of the poor,—the ridicule of the gay,—and the greedy joy of

heirs that care not though they be lifting up their eyes in torments, the subjects of

“That loudest laugh of hell—the pride of dying rich.”

YOUNG.

It is, in part, a different and additional form of the world's glory, when we mention *elevated rank in society*,—being an acknowledged part, or approved associate, of a distinguished and privileged class—sharing the honours, mingling in the circles, possessing the graces of the portion of human beings that look down from an eminence on the ordinary race ;—being on terms of access and communication with whatever is the most exalted in station ;—shining in brilliant assemblies ;—being the models of fashion,—the dictators of the modes and notions in the sphere of artificial society. All know how vehemently coveted and envied is this glory,—how elated, for the most part, the possessors of it feel. But the thought of leaving it ! with what a grim and ghostly aspect this thought must appear, when it *will* sometimes intrude ! what a vexation, what a perversion and injustice of destiny, it must seem to such, that *they* too must go the way of all the earth ! One has heard of instances of deep habitual chagrin, in the concluding stage of life. They begin to be regarded as ungracious, unwelcome lingerers in the gay and splendid scene,—a gaiety and splendour which is unwillingly shared with the marked victims of death. And must they go away in their mere, naked, sinful, being, divested of all their glory ? And “*where*” will they leave it ? Where ? In their funereal pomps ?

In the dimensions and decorations of their sepulchres ? In their names, which when called there is no living person to answer to ?

The possession of power is perhaps the idol supreme ;—to have at control, and in complete subjection, the action and the condition of numbers of mankind ;—to will and command, and it shall be done ;—to see the crowd, whether in heart obsequious or rebellious, practically awed, submissive, obedient. But it is not *that* voice that is long to command ! not that visage that shall long be met with submissive awe. Where will he have left this glory ? It will have vanished from around what will have remained of him,—will have vanished from the universe. So that his most envious rival—his most timid slave,—his meanest adulator, will bless himself on not being in his situation.

We might have named *martial glory*,—the object of the most ardent aspiration, and of the most pernicious idolatry. These sons of “*glory*,” with here and there an exception, pass from the scene by a speedier doom than the other classes. But to the question, as addressed to them, they boldly answer, “Leave it ?—in history, in fame, immortal fame.” There is often an utter delusion in this expectation. But be it so. Well ; and will the man of fame be you, your very self ? If the eulogy, the fame shall not reach to you, how will it be better than if it were some other man’s ? or no one’s ? shall you, in the regions of death, read it—hear it ? But even, suppose you should,—what is your conception of how it should please or benefit you there ? Have you such

wretched notions of that economy, as to imagine it a mere counterpart to the vanities and delusions of this? Are you such a pagan as to fancy that heroes are to be recognized in the other world to be idolised just as here? You *may* be added to the heroes and conquerors departed thither; but the prophet has given the question with which a former great conqueror was greeted by them,—“*Art thou become as one of us?*” And if to you they add another question—“*Where have you left your glory?*” would they not, from their own feelings, scorn you for answering—“In history—in imperishable fame?”

In the last place might be named—*intellectual glory*,—that of knowledge, talent, and great mental performance. And on this topic it should be noted, that throughout several of these illustrations, we have uniformly been supposing the glory of this world to be the men’s object—a self-idolatry, and a passion for distinction and admiration. And it is as regarded in this light, that the men intellectually eminent may be accosted with the question, “*Where will ye leave your glory?*” If they reply, like the heroic class, “Fame, admiration of posterity,” &c.—it is enough to say again,—what will that fame signify to *you*—to your very self? Even if it could reach you, do you expect so little enlargement of intellect, that you could be flattered by recollecting what you knew here? But more than this. If, in that passion for renown, you have exerted great powers of mind to do fatal and lasting mischief—to overwhelm truth—to corrupt the morals—to explode religion—to degrade the glory of the Redeemer—what then? If you can,

in *that* world, have any vital sympathy with your fame, your influence remaining in *this*—the consequence would but be—a quick continual succession of direful shocks, conveyed to your living spirit from what your works are doing here. Or do you reckon on non-existence after death? then, of all forms of madness, this passion for your “*glory*” is the maddest!

Contrast with all these forms of folly, the predominant aim of a Christian—which is “*glory*” still; but a glory which he will not have to leave! a glory accumulating for him in the world to which he is going—to which he is progressively transmitting, if we may so speak, the effects of all his exertions here, for God, for the Redeemer, for the good of men, for the future welfare of his soul, which he commits together with his spirit to Christ, and can say, “*I know that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.*”

February 5, 1823.

LECTURE V.

ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE.

ROMANS X. 2.

“ For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.”

THE first good use of some texts is,—to endeavour to prevent a bad one. To an evil-disposed mind it is exceedingly gratifying to find scripture that can be quoted with a specious appearance of sanction. This sentence is an example ; for it has very often been cited for the purpose of depreciating *zeal itself*, of the genuine kind, and in its best applications. Think on how many excellent projects, and efforts, and men, this has been pronounced—“ *zeal without knowledge.*” How many excellent and eventually successful designs would have been abandoned, if this had always been listened to as a right application of the text. What would have become, for instance, of most of the missionary projects which are now in hopeful, or eminently successful, operation ? Of many designs for enlightening, reforming, Christianizing, dark parts of our own nation ? of many venturous experiments for good, hazarded upon the strength of *one* circum-

stance in favour,—while there appeared many against ? of any project of hostility to a prevailing evil,—boldly conceived and undertaken ? In every such instance, the cry has infallibly been—“*Zeal without knowledge.*”

With men of indifferent, frozen, temperament, this has been about the most favourite sentence in the Bible. Timid, cowardly men, though otherwise well disposed, very naturally take refuge here.—The parsimonious are always ready with this good text.—The idolaters of custom, and of everything established and old.—An intellectual class, content with mere speculation, and regarding scarcely anything as worth being attempted to be done. With most of these classes of persons, however, it is not that zeal itself, for some use or other, is denied to be a most excellent thing. No, certainly ; they extol it,—and, “none would be more zealous than they,—on *a proper occasion.*” But when can that occasion come ? Is it to be an occasion expressly devised, and brought on by Providence for the one simple purpose of enabling *them* to show that they really possess this high virtue ? Or, is it to be when the world, and themselves, and all things, are a great deal mended, so that there shall be less difficulty, less to be done, and to be resisted ? But who, then, or what, is to do all this that is to be accomplished in the meantime ? There are immediately, and constantly at hand, plenty of such things as have always been deemed by zealous men the objects worthy of zeal. But the deficiency of this right spirit never fails to be supplied by ingenuity enough to make out, that these are not the

proper objects and occasions. How evident it is, therefore, that everything which may be said in the way of disapproving and repressing zeal, should be said cautiously and discriminatively.

But still, there is in the world an ill-judging, and unwarrantable, and pernicious zeal. Indeed, if we take zeal in its quite general sense—ardour,—persevering ardour, in prosecution of a purpose, it has been, in its depraved operation, the most dreadful pest on earth. It has been the very strength and soul, and animating demon, of every active evil. View it combined with any evil passion, and see what it can do,—with hatred—revenge—love of power. Behold it in the great troublers of the world, of all times and classes ; the conquerors—the savage exterminators—the persecutors—the impostors ! If this fire could have been suddenly quenched by some rain from heaven, these men would have sunk almost into nothing, though their depraved disposition had remained the same. And, as to many that are comparatively harmless, but have the evil, the malignant disposition, within them,—let but this fire be kindled, by a torch from hell applied to the brimstone that lies cold and quiet in their nature—and we should see !

But, not to dwell on these terrible operations of zeal, we see its effect in numberless things of a more diminutive order. For example ; earnest exertions, indefatigably prolonged, for supreme excellence in some most trifling attainment ; unremitting efforts in prosecution of inquiry into something not worth knowing (at least, not worth any cost to know) ; an

intense devotion, which devours the soul, to add particle after particle to the little sum of worldly possession; the earnest vieing with neighbouring fellow mortals in little points of appearance, consequence, precedence. So we see that zeal is an element that will combine with *any* active principle in man;—will give its strength and inspiration in any pursuit or interest under the sun;—will profane itself to the lowest, will be the glory of the highest; like fire, that will smoulder in garbage, and will lighten in the heavens.

Zeal thus has its operation in all the active interests of men. But, it is most usually spoken of as directed to something belonging to Religion, and it is in *this* relation that we have here to consider it. "*Zeal of God.*" And who can help wishing that there were a thousand times more zeal directed this way? Think of the whole measure of it that there is constantly expending by the human race, and what it is expended upon! what proportion of it might well be spared, from the actual application! Nay, even, what proportion of it would it be an unspeakable blessing to have extinguished and destroyed, rather than so applied? Say nine parts in ten; perhaps a still larger proportion. Now think, if but one of these portions misapplied, could be reclaimed, and purified, and devoted to the concerns of our *relation to God!* if two parts—if three,—and so forward. Look at an ambitious man's zeal;—the zeal of a man eagerly intent on the pomp and state of this life;—an avaricious man's zeal;—an indefatigable intellectual trifler's zeal! nine parts in ten

misapplied ; wasted, at the best ; a large portion of it far worse than wasted ! So it is going—while there is, here in sight, what deserves it all. If it could be withdrawn, and brought with its mighty operation *this way* ! (Simile of clouds, heavy with rain, passing in a direction *away* from a tract of plantations, gardens, and fields—languishing under drought—to be discharged on mere deserts, or marshes, or sea.—Or illustration from *fire*. Suppose a great city on fire in a severe winter ; besides the dreadful devastation and destruction, we might also have this idea—what a blessing *so much fire* would be, if distributed into all the abodes of shivering poverty and sickness.)

After such a view of the immense proportion of zeal altogether lost to what relates to God and religion, we are reluctant to be called to the consideration of this other fact ; namely, that a share even of the zeal that is directed to the things relating to God, may be unsound, or unwisely applied —“*not according to knowledge.*”

It were waste of time to insist on the necessity of a man's understanding something about what he is zealous for,—and why,—especially in what respects religion. The necessity of knowledge to zeal, when religion is concerned, is fearfully illustrated by the mighty empire of *superstition* over the far greater portion of this earth, even in this advanced period of its age—(Pagan—Mohammedan—Popish.) It is true that many of the adherents go no further than a stupid, slavish acquiescence ; and that some are sceptics or unbelievers, only preserving appearances ;

but countless legions of them are burning with fanatic zeal,—they *know* no better.

The direful history of *persecution*, again, illustrates what religious zeal may be without knowledge. For, though some persecutors have only been politic, infernal hypocrites, yet the mighty host of them have really believed that they did God service. The plain truth we are speaking of, has been illustrated by the whole principle and operation of propagating true religion by force ; to repress and destroy it has been the chief business of persecution, but in some cases to introduce and promote it.

The same instruction has been afforded by the wild novelties of fanaticism that have occasionally sprung up in the Christian community.

At the view of all these deplorable spectacles, the good man has still to exclaim, “Oh for knowledge ! for knowledge !” “When will the luminary rise, which shall let fall into men’s souls the ideas, the few simple truths, that would dispossess them of so many legions of demons !” He thinks, too, “how few propositions, admitted by them in full conviction, would have the effect of exposing the objects of their insane zeal before them, blasted and prostrate.”

But our original design was not so much to dwell on *extreme* and *prodigious* instances of a depraved religious zeal ; but to remark chiefly on several of the more ordinary forms in which we may observe zeal of a religious kind devoid of the rule and benefit of knowledge.

Some of these may, comparatively, *not* be evils of a highly aggravated and destructive character. We

cannot, however, say so, if we name, as one form of the erroneous zeal, that which the apostle here speaks of, namely, men's zealously maintaining the sufficiency of a righteousness of their own, which God will not accept. "*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*" Fatal ignorance in zeal! What would true and divinely enforced knowledge do for them here? It would reveal to them the awful holiness, justice, and law of God; would reveal *themselves* to them;—and then their zeal would go another way. As when an enlightened, convinced pagan perceives the god of his previous fanaticism to be no more than a worthless and loathsome idol.

But there are other modes of "*zeal not according to knowledge,*" in matters of religion. Very palpably it is so, when accompanied by no seeking or desire of knowledge; rather aversion to it,—dread of it,—deprecation of it. There is such religious zeal. No disposition to think and inquire. Horror of free reasoning. A notion that all religious speculation is necessarily destructive to religious feeling; that all knowledge *analagous* to Christian principles is but a feigned and treacherous ally. Insomuch, that the very reasons for *being* zealous are not to be so examined as to be clearly defined in the understanding,—not so tried as to be verified,—not reduced to so positive a form that they can be distinctly assigned. So that the quality and excellence of the general, or the particular, *object* of the zeal cannot be so stated as to show how justly the

zeal is applied. The active feeling is to be regarded as a kind of infallible impulse, so certainly under the direction of the Divine Intellect, that there is no need that the man should exert and improve *his own*. But, how is he so certain that his feelings are in such perfect acquiescent harmony with God? to be sure of *that*, would require knowledge, of no light attainment, truly! Whatever the strong impulse may be, it plainly is not "*zeal according to knowledge*," when a man does not clearly understand why he is zealous.

There is such a thing as a capricious and fluctuating zeal, (and indeed what we have just described is likely to be often such.) It shall glow and blaze at one time, and seem sunk under the ashes at another; varying with the changeable mood of the man's mind. But how does this accord to knowledge? What a man really knows at one time, he does not unknow, or know the contrary of, at another. It is true, that there will be, in most minds, very considerable variations of feeling,—of which the religious affection,—zeal, will in a measure partake. But a most important counteracting and sustaining principle here, is, a clear, decided knowledge of the object and reasons of the zeal. Without this, when the animated feeling intermits, all seems to be gone and vanished. As if, in regard to objects in the material world, a man were interested only by certain beautiful appearances dependent on sunshine, and made no account of their permanent *substance and form*. But knowledge keeps in clear, constant manifestation, the absolute value of the objects of zeal. And this will conduce to a speedier revival of

the feeling, after its temporary intermission or repression ; and will, in the interval, preserve the object from seeming to fade and melt into nothing.

The same charge may be applied to that zeal which consists, in a considerable degree, of mere temper ; when it is not a warm feeling toward the object, just for its own sake, and in proportion to its own claims ; but where a man's irritability, or anger, or impetuosity and restlessness for action, in some way on his own account, goes into the zeal for the object ; and is mistaken by him, as all pure zeal respecting the object itself. So that, in this one point especially, it is not "*according to knowledge* ;" for he knows not himself. "*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*" If this portion could be struck out of the zeal, there would be far less of it ; and the object itself would less seem to deserve it. But then, he did not before rightly know—justly estimate, the merits of the object.

A sort of counterpart to this, is that zeal which, in promoting any religious object, is less concerned about the object itself, as to be promoted, than about the man himself, as promoting it. Jehu's zeal,—it was, in mere point of fact, for the cause of the "Lord of hosts ;" while, from other circumstances, it would appear that he did not really care much for that sacred cause itself ; but it was a fine thing that *he* should be exhibited, as a conspicuous and important promoter and vindicator, prominent in the ranks of the Lord's "hosts."

Again, there may be a great zeal for comparatively little things in religion. It is easy to say, that

nothing in religion can be considered as, in an absolute sense, of little importance. And we may allow, that if a man were capable of zeal up to some stupendous pitch, so that, with regard to the greatest things of religion, it should emulate, and rival, and mingle its flames with the zeal of angelic spirits,—he might then constantly feel what would still be *great* zeal down at the *lowest points of the gradation*. This would be but in proportion. But let him think what is the whole amount, at the best, of his zeal ; and then, of the superlative importance of some things in religion ; and if so much is expended on the minor things, what will there be for the greater ? Now, *knowledge* gives the scale of the greater and the less. Let him see whether his zeal is “according” to that scale. There are minor points of doctrine—and various matters of form,—observance—external institution. These have often been magnified, and enforced, as if they were the very life and essence of Christianity.

But again ; there may be such a thing as *zeal for great things for little reasons*. Thus,—of Christianity in its whole substance, there have been zealous advocates, just on this ground, that it is conducive to the temporal well-being of a state ! By innumerable persons, some one model of Christian faith is zealously maintained, chiefly, because it has been maintained by their ancestors ! In individual instances, we have known persons zealously holding some important doctrine, chiefly, because it has happened to coincide with some particular fancy or impression of the person’s mind ; not from a

consideration of its own great evidences. This is a gross desertion of the rule—that zeal should be “*according to knowledge.*”

There is also a zeal for single, exclusive points in religion,—whether of greater or less importance—especially the most controverted ones; as if the whole importance of religion converged to those points, and were to be found there alone. (Example in the most strenuous Calvinists and Arminians.) Such zeal miserably impoverishes the interest for religion as a grand comprehensive whole, and for all the parts of it but the *one*. And thus the very “knowledge” itself will dwindle from taking account of *the whole*.

We hardly need mention the excessive zeal for a religious sect or party; often for it absolutely as such, and with a feeling which goes much beyond even their own estimate of the importance of the articles in which they differ; a merely worldly spirit of competition and jealousy. When it goes this length, it is “*according to knowledge,*” of a certain kind,—the “*wisdom*” that the apostle James describes as coming from below. Yet even this is put to the account of Christian zeal.

Our text would censure, also, some Christians who pertinaciously *will* expend their zeal in some one way of attempting to serve religion, when they might apply it to better purpose in another. Thus, able men have exhausted their talents and labours upon some comparatively trifling things relating to religion, when, with the same exertion, they might have served it in its *greatest* interests. And Christians of

inferior order have been seen invincibly set on serving the cause of God, in ways foreign to their attainments and situations, when there were plainly before them other ways of certain usefulness.

We may add to the enumeration, that zeal which, in attempting to do good, takes no account of the fitness of season and occasion. It is quite enough that the thing and the intention be good in themselves,—never mind *when, how, or where*. There is no attention to the particular circumstance of the situation ; no consideration of the things likely, in a particular instance, to fall in to pervert and frustrate ; no selection of opportunity ; no judicious policy respecting men's prejudices, or the circumstances that influence them. Of what value is knowledge, as thus illustrated by the want of it ! Knowledge would show the adaptation of means to ends,—the laws and working of human minds,—the favourable conjuncture. Knowledge would point to consequences. And zeal should not fancy itself the more noble and heroic for setting all consequences at defiance.

As the last thing in the description, we might note that zeal which seems willing to let its activity in public plans and exertions to serve religion, be a substitute for personal religion. It is pleasing to believe "*better things*" of the majority of such active persons, but the exceptions are too many and obvious. In such zeal, where is the man's knowledge, if it does not strike him—glare upon him, with irresistible conviction, how indispensable is religion to his own self ?

And this may suggest, as the concluding observa-

tion, (what ought to have been noticed much sooner,) that for the right qualification of religious zeal, *mere* knowledge, mere correct notional apprehension, *will not suffice*. As mere knowledge, it *will* prevent or repress some of the absurd and mischievous kinds of zeal ; but it will not kindle the true zeal for divine things. It *must* be a knowledge combined with the vital experience of Christianity.

February 20th, 1823.

LECTURE VI.

THE WRATH OF MAN OVERRULED.

PSALM lxxvi. 10.

“ Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee.”

IT is humiliating to contemplate the glory of God as connected with the ignominy of man ; that man should be such, that if his righteous Governor is to acquire glory from him, it must be by an exercise of the divine attributes against him.

It were an easy, but an useless and even melancholy, employment of thought, to figure out a splendid vision of what the state of our world might have been, if sin had not entered,—a state in which the glory of God should have been also, in its degree, the glory of man ; in which it should have been a *willing “praise”* that arose to the Most High from the virtues of man,—his conformity, devotion, gratitude, and delightful obedience. Vain musings ! But it may be sometimes a pleasing and rational employment of thought to go forward to the future age in which the vision will, in a glorious degree, be realized.

But thus far, through the long sad history, the glory of God has very much arisen from the display

of his power in contest with human iniquity. How the human nature could come into such a state, and why the sovereign Lord of all things suffered it to do so, have been the fruitless inquiries of innumerable speculating minds,—inquiries totally in vain. How such an awful fact is to answer, ultimately, a good end, is a matter to be surrendered to the wisdom and power of an Infinite Mind. And methinks it is a glorious thing that there should be a Mind to which all this is no difficulty either to comprehend or to accomplish. For ourselves, all we can say is, that the universe is vast—that eternity is long ; and that it is perfectly conceivable that, under such a government, acting and combining on such an immensity of space and duration,—it is perfectly conceivable (though not the manner how) that so much evil may answer a glorious end. And no doubt the redeemed and holy spirits will hereafter have a revelation, in part and by degrees, of this great mystery.

In the meantime, we clearly see God in opposition to man. And also we most clearly see that he is right. For wherein has he, through all ages, maintained this opposition ? What has he declared and acted against in man ? The things that we see and know to be in themselves pernicious and hateful ;—idolatry ; disregard of true religion ; delusion ; all the destructive passions ; all crime and vice ; all injustice among men ; oppression ; rapacious selfishness ; cruelty ; fraud. And therefore it is right that he should gain to himself glory, or “praise,” in this opposition. It is not the praise or glory of a powerful tyrant, but of a most righteous Governor. Should

he surrender to itself,—let go from his jurisdiction, a world that is careless of him, alienated, irreligious, rebellious? Should he give it up as a province of his dominion from which no tribute of honour can be gained, because it is averse to render him such tribute? Should he keep it in his great system, under a grand economy of nature and providence, as a portion entirely waste, as a planet not belonging to his dominion? May he not righteously extort by his power, from the very wickedness of his perverse subjects, a glory which their homage, their love, their obedience, will not yield him? And the whole spirit and avowal of his declarations is that he will do this. Insomuch that we need not hesitate to assert that, at the final account of this world, he will have derived from it as much glory as could have been derived.

But to think in what manner, of what kind, a stupendous proportion of this tribute will have been yielded! A world which has rendered the highest possible glory to its Creator, while it did not wish to glorify him! while its spirit has been estranged from his love and his fear; while pervaded by a dreadful enmity to him; while the scene of an enormous rebellion against him; while it created to itself all conceivable plagues, rather than be conformed to his holy laws; its successive generations through thousands of years maintaining the mortal strife against righteousness, truth, and the Supreme Good! So that if the spirit that has prevailed in the vast majority were, in the grand final estimate, to constitute, in itself simply and directly considered, the

account of what the world has rendered to the Creator's glory, (that is to say, that he had not in another way obtained and vindicated to himself that glory,) this world would have been, on the whole, a creation lost to his purpose ; carried out from the grand system of his designs, and appearing to fulfil the purpose rather of some power opposed to him. But we repeat,—He has an overruling wisdom and power, which can constrain the mighty evil that is in the world to render him honour against its will ; to act with an unconscious and undesigned subservience.

“ *The wrath of man* ” has been one of the greatest powers and monsters of evil, and our text affirms the certainty that this shall “ *praise* ” Him. How seldom, comparatively, has this been its direct design or tendency ! How little of it has been a pure, holy, burning zeal against iniquity ! though sometimes so, in Moses for instance. The wrath of man very generally involves a corrupt principle ; pride, arrogance, resentment, revenge. It is very often directed (as far as it has an intentional aim,) to an evil purpose ;—to destroy a just opposition ;—to re-act against an equitable authority and rule ;—to give effect to hatred against an offensive excellence ;—to inflict an unmeasured punishment on little offences ;—sometimes even to wreak pure unprovoked malice. Can such a thing as this be made to praise the all-righteous Being ? How transcendent, then, his power !

We may notice briefly several of the ways in which he has manifested this power ; many may easily occur to thoughtful minds.

Sometimes he has suddenly quelled and crushed the wrath itself. Many instances are on record, in which men burning with fury, perhaps against good things, or good men, have been suddenly smitten with an inexplicable terror ; as if the very explosion of their own fire had shattered themselves to pieces ; as if they had seen their own fury reflected in a direful flush from a demon's visage,—presented to their view for an instant, and then gone. In many of the instances, there has been no distinct assignable cause ; but we need make no difficulty of believing some of the accounts, in which the effect has been ascribed to ominous incidents, strange and frightful phenomena in the elements, &c., giving a sudden, striking, alarming intimation of the hostile presence of an invisible superior power.

Sometimes the wrath, and the persons actuated by it, have been suddenly crushed by an avenging stroke of divine justice. All will recollect Corah, Dathan, and Abiram,—and out of the Scripture records there have been many instances. A friend now present was citing to me a well-authenticated record (in a past age) of a person who was furiously cursing and blaspheming, and was literally swallowed up by a sudden opening of the earth. There are accounts of the deaths of violent haters of religion and of God, by the strangest accidents, and under such remarkable conjunctures of time and circumstances, as to make on their contemporaries and neighbours an irresistible impression of judicial interposition. Sometimes the instrument has been a terrible one ; sometimes apparently trivial. And in some cases not

fatal (i. e. as to life) the malignant rage has been made to recoil in effects which have marked out the persons as living monuments of the divine vengeance,—a terror to themselves and all about them.

It is pleasing to divert a moment to another sort of instances meeting the terms of the text ; namely, persons who, when impelled with violent animosity against religion, and its faithful adherents, have been suddenly smitten and arrested with religious conviction. We hardly need name the great Apostle, who is at the head of them ; but there have been many examples (of an inferior order) even in recent times ; men who have perhaps vowed to perpetrate some atrocious violence against some unusual manifestation of religion—have gone with a determined design against the person and life of some pious, zealous proclaimer of the truth, prepared with weapons or missiles ; but when they have come to the place, and when their rage would naturally have been exasperated, they have felt in the first instance as if some invisible fetters were on their very limbs ; and then, their attention has been fixed, as if by a spell ; they have had new and strange perceptions ; conscience has been aroused ; the fury has been changed to fear and distress, to penitence and prayer. The convert has not been slow to declare all this, at the cost of scorn and malice, and has become a zealous promoter of the good cause. So wonderful a change has led others to serious thought ; and how great the “*praise*” that has thus arisen to God !

“*The wrath of man*” has been made subservient

to the “praise” of God by provoking signal manifestations of his power, in very many ways. For example, (and we have adverted to some of them already) those in vindication of his insulted majesty. Not that his supreme majesty can be injured, or can need any avenging! But, if he is to govern the earth, it is requisite that *that* be done which shall preserve an awful reverence in his subjects; that he shall not be defied with impunity, by “*wrath*” pointed at him. Therefore such transactions have taken place as those in Egypt and at the Red Sea. But even the people so delivered insulted him repeatedly with a stupendous audacity; and therefore were visited with avenging judgments, to smite down this horrid presumption (Sennacherib;—Antiochus Epiphanes;—that most dreadful of all tragedies, the destruction of Jerusalem.) Such vindictive judgments on the wrath of man pointed against God have made it subserve to His glory,—inasmuch as they have stood up conspicuous monuments and testimonies to all ages, that he is not to be insulted and defied by his creatures. And through the course of subsequent time, there have not been wanting examples to the same effect. Yet the Almighty has been sparing of these dispensations, in their most special and terrible forms; if we consider what a number of impetuous, rancorous emotions, and daring expressions, have been (not only virtually so, as all sin is, but) directly and formally against him.

Again;—“*the wrath of man,*” as against the cause and people of God, has been overruled to his praise. We are not falsely accusing the world, when we say

that a vast proportion of its hostile passion and action has been in this direction, between intense persecution and a more general evil-mindedness and opposition. We may apply the text to the history of persecution. This wrathful proceeding has, for one thing, driven the adherents of the good cause into a wide dispersion ; and wherever they have gone, they have carried their sacred faith and become its apostles ; they have carried much of their Christian virtues also. Where they have remained suffering, their exemplary fortitude, resignation, and fidelity, have displayed their cause, their religion, with the advantage of being associated with these virtues. When they have been consigned to torments and a violent death, their invincible determination, heroic devotement and unshaken constancy have displayed much more than—*their absolute conviction of the truth* of what they suffered for ; have proved that a divine energy supported them,—proved, therefore, that their cause was the cause of God. It is true, and familiar enough to our knowledge, that there have been martyrs (though not many) for doctrines that were false ; (several for Atheism itself.) But these were either persons most ardently fanatical, almost up to the pitch of madness ; or men of the most proud, intrepid, obstinate temperament. But look at the myriads of Christian sufferers, of both sexes, of all ages, and of all qualities ; many of them of little natural courage, few of them inured to Spartan and martial habits. And it were contemptible and wilful folly to affect not to see a divine power and testimony in this ; multitudes of heathens did see

it in this light ; and themselves became Christians and martyrs through the conviction. Now here, God received glory in consequence of "*the wrath of man.*" His religion was magnificently honoured,—his intervention was evinced—his cause was rapidly extended.

But it was not alone in empowering his children to brave terrors and sufferings, that he interposed to frustrate the wrath of man. The history of such seasons and scenes abounds with the most remarkable instances of providential interposition to save or rescue particular individuals from their enemies. The keen malignity was close upon the prey ; but when it made the tiger-spring, the expected victim eluded, and was gone. And sometimes when the defenceless subject, was, in all human appearance, absolutely in the destroyer's grasp, turns of circumstances the most improbable have, in an instant, mocked the malice and power ; so that the wrath has been reduced to vent itself in vain curses, while the rescued servant of God has in safety been blessing him. In what terms and feelings was he "praised" by the company to which Peter went from prison ? And then again, by his avenging judgments on those who have endeavoured to destroy his people and cause, God has gained himself glory. Every nation and kingdom where this has been done, has, in one manner or another, been the scene of his vindictive visitation. And these manifestations have impressed a reverential awe of him. And there are memorable examples of such visitation on individuals, from monarchs down to the most subordinate agents of

persecution. There have been disastrous turns of events, sometimes precisely and most critical, arising from some of their persecuting proceedings,—hideous diseases,—desperate remorse and horror toward the conclusion of their lives. And all the while, and in defiance of all, the good cause has been maintained and progressive, in an almost unaccountable manner, when mighty power was against it, as well as all manner of craft and machination ; while it had no power of the secular kind. Thus God has made the powerful "*wrath of man*" a striking illustration of *his* power, and of his faithfulness to his promises.

It were a somewhat varied illustration of the text to observe, that God has in some instances suffered "*the wrath of man*" to work on in a successful process, and without any apparent interference or opposition, *till* it was just coming to its natural result ; and *then*, by a sudden interposition, has caused a result infinitely different. (Instance of Haman—Daniel—Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, though in this last instance, the process short.) It is striking to conceive of the Almighty as calmly beholding a design, step after step, well devised, with fulness of power and means, and offering no interruption—the triumph of iniquity already beginning—and then !—

Another exemplification is, where it comports with his own sovereign designs to permit the operation of the wrath of man quite on to the effect intended ; all this being but the train to accomplish a glorious purpose of his own ; so that the rage of iniquity, from first to last, works unintentionally for him. The

superlative example of this is the death of the Son of God. It was a divine decree that this great sacrifice should be offered for human redemption. If we might, for an instant, entertain such a supposition, as that there had not been in that peculiar people, a wickedness so extreme as would perpetrate the deed, —doubtless it would by other agency have been effected. But there was no need of any extraordinary agency ; it was only for providence to leave human nature to its course,—and the deed would be done. There was no creation of a special and extraordinary malignity and delusion to accomplish the object. God only suffered man to evince and display, by the very fact itself, how dreadfully the race was depraved and fallen. The long process of “wrath” went on, in desperate malignity ; each stage was an advance towards accomplishing the *human* purpose, but also *that of God*. There was no extraordinary interposition to frustrate the design. It was accomplished ! and the wrath of man triumphed. But over this temporary and deluded triumph of wickedness was the sovereign triumph of the divine purpose and the divine mercy. And thus that wrath of man is turned, victoriously, to the glory of God, in the case of every human being that has been, or shall be, saved for ever, through the efficacy of that sacrifice.

We will only add just one more illustration, and of a different order. God makes use of this great evil, “*the wrath of man*,” to make war on and destroy other great evils in the earth ;—he lets it go forth, with his commission as a gigantic demolisher. One wicked nation has been made his avenger on the

greater wickedness of another. Wars of conquest have been directed by Providence to break up a state of ignorance, and barbarism, which seemed otherwise to have a principle of perpetuity. Furious invasions, iniquitous in their principle, and intended for no good, have had the effect of destroying monstrous tyrannies, and direful superstitions. Those formidable invincible Romans were made such an instrument by Providence. The Spanish invasion of Mexico demolished a superstition, perhaps the most infernal on the globe. And we confidently trust in the Almighty power and goodness, that if a mighty design which now agitates the minds of the nations shall go into operation, it will, besides being utterly frustrated in what it does intend, be overruled to accomplish a glorious effect, perfectly foreign and contrary to what it intends.

March 5th, 1823.

LECTURE VII.

SOCIAL CHANGES SUBSERVIENT TO THE KINGDOM
OF CHRIST.

EZEKIEL xxi. 27.

“ I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him.”

THIS chapter contains a prophecy of the alienation, the subversion, the overthrow of the high and independent dominion in the Jewish nation ; a prediction of successive upsettings and numerous confusions ; a declaration that the dominion should “ be no more,” in a high and perfect state, till a personage should come whose “ right it would be.” This personage, in the opinion of the best expositors, is no other than the Messiah.

The solemn sentence we have read will perhaps authorize us in a more extensive application than any mere reference to the Jewish nation and dominion,—an application no less than to the *general state of the world*, and especially in the present and approaching times. It is certainly under the great law and destiny of being “ overturned, overturned.” And well that it is so ! There is a well-known phrase, which has been applied by one and another to

various things in the world, just as anything happened to be a favourite of prejudice or fancy, "ESTO PERPETUA." But methinks, a sober and enlightened looker on the world will not find very many things on which he can deliberately pronounce it. He certainly cannot begin with it at home, (in the strict sense,) that is, the state of his own mind taken entire and as it is. There is no conceivable thing that he would more earnestly deprecate. And if he shall cast a rapid glance of survey over the world, his attention will very soon be arrested by many things which he would not wish exempted from such a denunciation as that of the text. Let him look abroad with this plain question on his thoughts,—

What prevents that there should be far more true religion, practical justice, genuine liberty and peace, in the world? *What prevents?* We do not so much refer to the general cause (the radical perversity of human nature) as to the more special and formal ones. Now if he be a genuine friend to God and man, nothing that is thus preventive and hostile, will, on any account, find favour with him; so that he should deprecate the sentence being passed upon it, "*overturn! overturn!*" Not even though a self-interest or a supposed national interest might be served by the continuance. For an example of such supposed national interests,—but a few years since, it was advanced, without any apparent shame, as an argument against all attempts at Christianizing the people of India, that if such a design were effected the consequence would be, that those nations would throw off our yoke ultimately.

Perhaps we should not proceed on such a subject without first joining in the protest against the passion for mere change and commotion ; a restless discontent that everything should continue as it is. Certainly there has, in late times, been a measure of this diseased passion at work ; and accompanied by something worse, that is, an unprincipled purpose set upon grasping, unrighteous, selfish advantages, at all costs and hazards to mankind. But this is so very evidently pernicious, and so palpably against the general interest and will, that it never can be long or extensively prevalent. Yet Providence may occasionally make use even of this for its great purposes ; may let loose the wild violence, and direct its operation, on what is decreed to be demolished.

However, a good man wants not to excite to activity any such spirit while he beholds the things he wishes overturned. *What* things ? You have only to reflect a moment what has at one time or another struck you the most forcibly as obstructing religion, improvement, happiness among men, and inflicting mischief and misery. At different times you have been moved with regret, and indignation, and almost horror, as the several grand evils, that are oppressing and blasting the world, have unfolded their deformity and malignant effects to your view. One mighty system of iniquity crushing down a great portion of the order of human welfare. Another gigantic shape of mischief devouring a share of what would remain ; and yet another,—like the successive plagues of Egypt. So that if they could be presented all at once in one view you would feel yourself

surrounded by such a combination of monsters as poetry never feigned ; (never in *one* exhibition.)

Perhaps the first that will occur to the mind is,—*false, pernicious religion*. But there is something dreadful in the conjunction of these terms,—*religion—false—pernicious*, and we might add, *infernal!* *Religion!* the light of the world! turned into error, delusion, and darkness! *Religion!* the sacred bond of the creature to the glorious Creator! rent and re-formed into a bondage to all that is in opposition to him! *Religion!* designed as the purifier and elevator of man,—transformed into the promoter, even the creator and the sanction, of his corruption and degradation! *Religion*, in short, the happiness of man on earth, and the preparation for eternal happiness, converted into a cause of misery, here and hereafter!

Then, “*overturn! overturn!*” Will not any possible concussions and convulsions,—any kind of moral earthquake that may contribute to demolish, be a blessing? To annihilate such a pest as Sodom, the vale of Siddim was well lost! To exterminate a legion of murderers, the reduction of the surrounding country to a temporary desert, would be a cheap sacrifice. And by whatever it shall cost to destroy false religion, the world will be a gainer. Let it fall! though the world should tremble to its centre at the crash! At the view of each great division of this enormous iniquity (the Pagan—Mohammedan—Popish), the imprecation will still be, “*overturn, overturn!*” At the view of each great distinguishing property and characteristic of false religion, we shall utter the

same word ! For instance :—*that* property or principle of it by which it strikes down, prostrate on the ground, unnumbered myriads of immortal spirits in homage to some piece of inanimate matter, as once on the plains of Dura ; *that*, by which it invests a class of men with a reputed sanctity and power, to delude and overawe their fellow mortals ; *that*, by which it enjoins or sanctions cruelty and all wickedness as pious service ; *that*, by which it repels and curses knowledge as a mortal plague ; *that*, by which it amuses and dissipates the minds, and lays the conscience dead, with an infinity of ceremonies ; *that*, by which (in some of the nations called Christian) it takes the very doctrines and facts of the true religion, and perverts them to wicked purposes. At the sight of each and all of these, we shall exclaim, “ *overturn ! overturn !* ”

A vast system of military fortifications of the Infernal King is spread over the whole earth ; the glaring evidence of his invasion, and usurped, continued dominion. It is delightful to see, at any quarter, the cracks and rents of a commencing dilapidation ; to see the ground beginning to heave and tremble under the odious weight. Imagine, in any country, a mighty fortress of a cruel tyrant, constituting the main strength of his occupancy,—even the most dreadful earthquake would be almost welcome to the people, if they saw that it was prostrating the massive walls, the impregnable towers of this fortress ; their own humble abodes might be seen falling, but “ look yonder ! something else is also falling ! ”

Again, what ruinations there must be on earth before Christianity is set quite clear and pure from all the corruptions of worldly policy. "Let the train of them go on!" will every one say that loves it in its heavenly simplicity. "*Overturn!*" will still be his prayer with respect to all systems and institutions, which, by their principle, put religion on any ground where it must be necessarily and primarily a secular affair; where the spiritual interests shall be made formally subsidiary and servile to the secular; where secular regards will necessarily have the ascendancy; where the leading considerations will naturally be those of emolument and ambition.

Under this topic of religion may be named, as work for the process of subversion, all such erroneous opinions in religion as are deeply injurious, or quite fatal, to the very object of Christianity. Not that we are anticipating ever on earth any such thing as a complete uniformity, (that object for which the powers of earth and hell have so often been moved.) But if the mighty course of revolutions is intended by the Almighty for the very purpose (as its grand, supreme object) of making Christianity prevalent in the earth, it must be *true* Christianity; and the false and pernicious forms of opinion must sink for the same reason that Christianity at all, is to be advanced over the world. Among the most pernicious doctrines, must be all such as tend necessarily to cherish and exalt human pride. It would be well and wisely done—would it not? for the Almighty to be overturning, and overturning, the whole state of the world, to promote a religion which should teach men

to be better pleased with themselves ; and of course to form a lower idea of his holy and all-perfect law ! And again, would it be well and consistently done, for him to be promoting by a progress of tremendous convulsions, demolitions, and re-creations, a religion expressly under the character of the dominion of the Messiah ?—and yet *that* religion should zealously represent the Messiah in such a character that there should be an inexpressibly absurd (I was going to say, ludicrous,) disproportion and incongruity between *him* and *the magnificence of this dominion* ? All images, and kinds, and degrees, and combinations of splendour and celebration,—all superlatives of blessing, and glory, and honour, and majesty, in the description of his kingdom,—and all this, converging and shining upon him personally, as the central majesty of the scene,—and yet *He* might just as well have been John the Baptist, or any one of the apostles ! To other doctrines to fall with the rise of Christianity we need not particularly allude.

There are other evils of great magnitude, on which we have to imprecate the fulfilment of the text. We named *genuine freedom* as having but a narrow and repressed existence on earth. It is true enough that mankind have been very imperfectly fit for freedom in any age ; but it has not been from a benevolent consideration of this that tyrants have kept them in slavery ; not from a paternal kindness as for children not to be trusted to themselves. No, they have systematically kept them in a state fit to be tyrannized over. And very successful the policy has been.

The history of the world presents, almost over its whole vast breadth, one melancholy spectacle of mankind subjected to the uncontrolled will of a few individuals, assuming the station of deities, and very many of them the worst of their race, "*the basest of men!*" And think how the nations have fared under this domination and proprietorship, in which they have suffered themselves to be held captive, forced to all uses, like any other property, to gratify their lords; but, above all, to the one grand use of destroying one another. They have perished in prodigious heaps, to determine the question whose property they were! (Cantemir's Othman Empire—Wars of York and Lancaster.) Now, is this the right condition for mankind to be in? Or will it be a state of things permitted, by God or man, to continue, as knowledge shall be extended, and religion prevail? Yet what do we behold at this hour? A league of three or four individuals to dictate peremptorily to the civilized world as it is called, to perhaps nearly two hundred millions of human beings. And with a threatening of unlimited slaughter and devastation, if disobeyed. And with mighty means to execute the threatening. Such a system resolutely maintained must come to a tremendous result. It will ultimately compel two vast orders of will and force into awful conflict; like that of the fire and water at the last day. For it cannot be that God has appointed the general human mind to subside in quiet enslavement and stagnation. There will be mighty commotions; a "*shaking of the nations*" in all probability. But the omens are very dark as to any speedy results.

from them of a kind to satisfy a Christian and philanthropic spirit. The gloomy omens arise from this,—that God has his own controversy with all the nations. The assemblage of nations, over which the portentous signs are darkening and thickening with the gloom of thunder, are nominally Christian nations ;—but, for the far greater part, sunk in actual idolatry, mingled with infidelity. If some of these be excited to a grand commotion against overwhelming tyranny,—the simple point of right, so far, may be plain ; but this is not all. Where there is a conflict between a nation of idolaters on the one side, and of mingled idolaters and infidels on the other, there is much more in the case for the jurisdiction of the Supreme Governor, than a mere question of relative right in the particular matter immediately in question. He may set that question aside for a while, and, in his sovereign justice, make such nations the equal scourges of one another ; and, in such a process, there may be a succession of overturnings, each apparently reversing the preceding. And when we survey the superstition, and the irreligion, and the moral depravity equally combined with both, through the nations of Europe, we have cause to apprehend a long train of convulsions and calamities before either liberty or religion can prevail.

Indeed, how should there be any such thing as genuine liberty in combination with the slavery of superstition, and the licence of irreligion and vice ? And it is awful to think with what a measure of calamity these may first be visited ; partly to punish, and partly to shake and loosen their hold. If we

look at superstition, alone, the popish superstition, *that* has, in some of the countries, taken such entire possession of the people's minds, so wholly pervaded and conformed their habits of thought,—and is so interwoven in all their institutions, that a confusion and upsetting of their whole national economy may be absolutely necessary to shake this odious despotism of error and delusion. Something may be necessary to disturb, confound, and distract their minds ;—to drive and bear them out of their ancient position ;—to force thoughts, and doubts, and new apprehensions upon them ;—to make a convulsive wrench of their mental fetters ;—to shake, and crack, and rive their prison-house. It may be necessary that the regular order of their superstitious ceremonies should be violently interrupted and broken up. It may be necessary that many of their institutions be ruined ; and their ecclesiastical tyrants be rendered objects of suspicion, hostility, or contempt. *This* may be the required “*overturning* ;” and this may be effected by political commotion ; by war and revolution, backward and forward. “*Necessary*,” we said ; not of course that God could not cause a nation's deliverance from superstition by milder means. But mild means have not been his method with corrupted, superstitious nations, (the Jews for example,) and are very little likely to be so now. Therefore, if the Almighty be really going to accelerate the progress of his cause, and of human improvement—(and the thickening shocks and commotions of the moral world corresponding to the images and predictions of prophecy warrant us to hope so)—we have yet a dark and

fearful prospect before us. But the consolation is that all these "*overturnings*" are to displace and destroy what obstructs the cause of heaven, and of human happiness. And the object is worth all that the Sovereign Governor has doomed that it shall cost. To hasten the destruction of the spiritual reign of "*the man of sin*," and of the stupifying dominion of ignorance, and of the oppressions of despots and tyrants—it is worth that there should be wars, invasions, and revolutions, dreadful as they are. Dreadful indeed! and thus we see what nations that forget God, and grow inveterate in evil, entail on their posterity.

"*I will overturn, overturn, overturn!*" The repetition of this word of solemn denunciation has a striking sound and import. How strongly it intimates the reluctance of mankind to change to what is good,—to what is finally right. They and their affairs change only to what requires to be changed again; and a third time changed, and still again! What a race it is! that when driven from one position by divine judgments and calamities, is sure to go in a direction where it must be encountered by more such judgments! so that they cannot, at the first turn, have the good that is intended ultimately from violent changes: there must be more changes first.

Men of easy faith, and sanguine hope, have sometimes, after one great commotion and change, joyously assured themselves that *this* would suffice. "The grand evil is removed,—we shall now happily and fast advance, with a clear scene before us." But

after a while, to their surprise and dismay, another commotion and change has perhaps carried the whole affair back, apparently, to the same state as before ! Recollect the history of the Reformation in this land ; begun by Henry VIII., and established, it was gladly assumed, in the reign of his son. But, that, youth dies, and then we have the instant return of popery, in all its triumph, fury, and revenge. After a while Queen Mary departs ; and all the pious souls exult in liberation and protestantism. But then, again, in Elizabeth's time, there comes a half-popish, severe, spiritual tyranny. Later down, after the overthrow of the tyrant Charles, there arose, for the first time, a prospect of real religious liberty. But his son resumes the throne, and all such liberty was utterly abolished, and so continued long ; and another revolution was required, that religious faith and worship might be free.

In human affairs there have sometimes been great overturnings, which did give a rare and glorious opportunity for good, *if*, at the juncture there had been the wisdom and uprightness to take advantage of them ; but, instead, there was folly or iniquity just ready at hand ! Providence did not send the wisdom and equity to guide the change. Why ? Because the state of men was such as to deserve and require more vials of the divine judgments to be poured out. It has even sometimes been intended to remove and clear away almost the whole present generation, when no rigours or terrors of discipline, could frighten men from their iniquities. That this last fact may be, all history testifies, and revelation too. Recollect the

prophetic description, that after the most awful plagues, the people that remained, "*blasphemed the God of heaven.*" Were not their expressions equal to an infallible prophecy of more such visitations, to destroy the survivors of the preceding?

But it is not *the wicked* alone that suffer in the mighty convulsions in human affairs; the same as in the calamitous events in the natural world. But the faithful, the children of God, have high consolation; their supreme interest is safe. The calamities are something better to them than mere inflictions and punishments. Their hatred of sin is aggravated;—their sense of dependence on God exercised;—they become more detached from the world;—and they have faith that these events are successive measures in a divine process for bringing about the most glorious ends at length. The brightness of these anticipated ends seems to shine back on the dark train of the means.

And here observe, how different may be the ends that God has in view, from any that may be intended by the immediate chief actors. ("*He meaneth not so, but it is in his heart to cut off and destroy nations not a few.*") And often these actors may be amazed and confounded by results directly contrary to what they had intended. As to the actors and instruments, God will make many *bad* ones serve his great design,—the lovers of commotion for its own sake, as before observed,—the haters of all good order,—insane ambition,—bigoted superstition,—and, perhaps very eminently, infidelity itself. Let us adore the wisdom and power that can make even all these work to an

ultimately glorious end ! That *end*, for which are all the "*overturnings*," is the glorious kingdom on earth "*of HIM whose right it is ;*" his *right* all this while ! (Mysterious that he should permit himself to be so long debarred !)—his right, by many and infinite claims—his right, assured by prophetic declaration. How just then the overturning of all things that withstand it ! And if his right, how certain to be at length possessed ! And how happy the scene when he shall have taken the full possession ! A splendid contrast for the readers, then, of the history of our times !

As to us, meanwhile, who live in the introductory period of change and commotion, perhaps but few of us may live to see much of the consequences in their absolutely pure and happy quality. There will be a long and troubled course with evil mingled and contesting with the good ;—yet the good, we trust, becoming continually more apparent. We must live in faith, and hope, and prayer ;—labour to maintain an entire resignation to the divine sovereignty. Be intent ourselves on "*overturning*" what little God shall enable us, of the obstructing evil within our small sphere ; not be looking at it always on the great scale, in its immense bulk, and overlooking its parts, some of which are near us, and in our reach. Maintain a constant concern, that we have our main interest secure in that world where there is nothing to be overturned ; in "*the kingdom that cannot be moved*," where all has been constituted in harmony with the divine mind ; where his sacred energy has never permitted evil to occupy a position ; where no

sin is to be rooted out,—no idol to be dethroned,—no prison-house of the soul to be demolished; where there is no enemy's fortress to deform the scene of eternal peace and security. Be there our portion prepared and awaiting! "*I appoint unto you a kingdom,*" said our Lord. But appointed for *whom*? not for such as take no concern in the advancement of his kingdom in this bad world. Will any one say,—“I aspire and hope to go to the kingdom of Christ above, where all is stability and serenity for ever, but I will stand aloof from all active co-operation with his cause on earth, while it is making its arduous progress through conflict and commotion. Overthrowing its obstacles and its rivals is too mighty and ambitious an affair for me! but no, let it alone! I might really do what would displace one stone toward '*overturning*' the ancient wall of separation between the Indians, Pagans, and Christianity, or contribute to upset one hateful idol,—but no, let it alone! The cause is in the best hands, and will prevail at length. He whose '*right*' is all Asia and the world, *will* possess it.”—Yes, he will; but then he will have a long memory back; He will remember who they were, that, in humble and affectionate zeal for him, did what they *could*, during the progress of his cause, and who they were that thought it better to stand indifferent by.

April 9th, 1823.

LECTURE VIII.

THE REDEMPTION OF TIME.

EPHESIANS v. 16.

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

WE propose to take these words for use in a plain and general sense, rather than to fix and limit our attention to the precise idea intended. We might, nevertheless, make a very good use, in application to our own condition, of the latter part of the sentence—*“because the days are evil.”* Whether they be not really so in some respects, we may appeal to sensible experience ; whether they be not so in other respects, we may appeal to reflective thought. As to the testimony of experience,—have not men, generally a strong, habitual, invincible sense, that the days in their course, are not, to their experience, such as they could desire ? Possibly this is not the case with some gay elastic spirits, in youth, high health, and full prosperity. But what is the far more common, the general experience, even when there is nothing particularly and extremely grievous ? Is it not a certain sense that the days as they come and go might be ever so much happier ? that it is hardly

with the aspect of friends that they introduce themselves, and that they retire? They lie on the spirit with a certain ungracious weight, something like an habitual bodily disease, not acutely painful—the direct sense of it sometimes suspended—but with a prevailing consciousness of not being well. “*The days are evil.*” They are felt to be so on this account for one thing, that they are subject to so many things which are out of men’s power,—independent of their will and control. They are liable to have so many untoward things happening to them, which no one can prevent or even foresee. They seem, in a measure, at the mercy of whatever and whoever may be disposed to trouble them,—the tempers of men,—the malice of enemies,—the indiscretion of friends,—the perverseness or incompetency of co-operators,—the occurrences called pure accidents. At the beginning of a series of days (a month, a week) or of one day, the possibilities of this kind are incalculable. What a Providence there must be over us, that many more of these things do not actually fall upon our days. But still the sense of the constant liability, and the actual occurrence, in numerous instances, give a character of evil to the days. Suppose the parallel case of any sort of valuable property (a storehouse or plantation) exposed to inroads, waste, depredation; what an “*evil*” circumstance it would be as attending that property!

Another point of experience to the same effect is—that the days are darkened by *spectacles of “evil,”* especially to persons of much moral and religious sensibility. How long can they look out, and which

way, without being met by the grievous and odious spectacles? For example, in our time, what are among the most prominent subjects in each day's intelligence, reading, and talking? A system of *Slavery* maintained by a Christian nation, over nearly a million of human beings;—a *War* as iniquitous and execrable in principle as ever disgraced the earth, excepting one of pure religious persecution;—a combination of the greatest powers of the earth (*Christian* too) to crush and destroy all human liberty, both of sentiment and action, and therefore to stop and blast all improvement. And as to the nearer and more ordinary things, the evils less formal, massive, and mountainous in the view,—what sort of mind would it be, that should have little perception of—should take no impression from,—the irreligion and profaneness, the modes and instances of injustice, the exhibitions of folly,—within the sphere of his knowledge and even observations? It were a fine thing, doubtless, to have habitually, such a view of the world, that all this should appear but a slight circumstance in it, throwing but little of shade on the scene, letting it still be gaiety and brightness on the whole. And so it were a fine thing to have a good long night's dream of being in paradise, all beauty, innocence, and happiness. A finer thing still, to have the faculty of dreaming so, while awake; but this faculty was not given to him who said, "*I beheld transgressors, and was grieved.*" "*Rivers of waters run down my eyes, because they keep not thy law.*" "*Hast thou made all men in vain?*"

Once more in the appeal to experience, that "*the days are evil*;" men as individuals are forced to feel that their days are affected by the general evils of the times. If there be commotions, wars, public profligacy, public danger, severe burdens, the distresses come on individuals, even if they had no share in the causes. There hardly ever was a more decided expression of general distress of the times than in our days. And think what numbers, beyond calculation, of worthy persons in our times have experienced a harassing share of the evils of these times,—their "days" successively invaded by anxiety, difficulty, and grievous apprehension, by the necessity of painful, unremitting exertion,—afraid of the next day, the next week; the Lord's day itself imperfectly rescued, as by a continual battle with invading thoughts and fears; to "*redeem*" even that "*time*" as a day of *rest*, has been one of the very hardest *exertions* of the whole week. And independently of all this, there is to each one, the share, more or less, of the evils of mortal life; the bodily disorders and pains, the cares, the disappointments, the afflictive deprivations. Such is the plain testimony of experience that our text does not apply a wrong word of description to the "*days*."

But such consideration would take account of several other circumstances, or character, in the condition of our days, and more directly tending to enforce the precept—"redeem the time."

One character of evil in them is, that they bear not in themselves a necessity of good, in the higher sense of the word; so that it is but by force that they

will tend to good or produce it. How happy, if, at the beginning of a day, (or series,) there were some absolute necessity that a man must grow better, wiser, happier, by the end of it! This, we trust, is the glorious state of the grand majority of the rational inhabitants of the universe: of good men in the other world. But with us! If days be suffered to pass just as they will, just as may happen,—can we say, “The time is our faithful friend,—it will be sure to bring us to some good:—let it go, and float along? Permit any occurring fancy or inclination to take the lead; should it be otherwise than a good and wise one, there is some sacred virtue in the day itself to correct it, in its effects? The mere ‘*time*’ has a sanative and meliorating energy; we may trust to it as to a guardian angel. The day when it shall retire into night, never to return, will certainly leave us better?” No! no! We are to regard the day as not even so much as a doubtful friend;—but, as come to be with us a little while, with no disposition to do us good; most ready to betray us into evil. (How many at this hour are almost cursing the day that is now gone!) Yet, though it be so little a friend, we may *extort* much good from it. But no way else than by force, can we obtain that good; by an exertion of judgment, resolution, diligence, divine aid. But here, again, as to the measure of the good to be so realised, there is often a complaint of wise and good men, that the days are “*evil*.” They often estimate, with regret, the quantity of good acquired or done, in one day, or seven, or thirty—“Is this all? all the good from so many moments, hours? Evil days! unpro-

pitious, parsimonious ;—of which the tribute is so small. My knowledge so little extended on the edge of the vast space of my ignorance. My principles, my conscience, my piety, so little advanced against my corruptions. All the good I would attain or effect, so narrow a space in advance of the point where it was, when hundreds or thousands of hours had yet to pass which are now past. And then to think how much, how liberally these very same days have contributed to evil that is in the world !” This feeling may exceed the due bounds, and become a kind of remonstrance against the very condition of mortality. But how rarely is there any such blameable excess ! And here at all events is a strong argument for “*redeeming time*.”

Again ; the *uncertainty* of our “*days*” may be regarded as, in some respects, an “*evil*” circumstance, but strongly enforcing the precept. It is our poverty : we have no ascertained property in days to come. It places all plans and undertakings on so precarious a ground. We know not that we shall have days to finish, or proceed any length, in any of them. Whatever is of the nature of experiment, we know not if we shall live to see the result ; what we are learning, we may not live to apply. Error,—neglect,—failure,—we may not have days to repair. And yet, while thus uncertain, they bring with them, each as it comes, a strange beguilement. Each looks far more like the promise of many to come, than a warning that there may be no more ; or an admonition of the last ; it bears no palpable, threatening, ominous sign. So that, thought, very serious and frequent thought,

is required to prevent a presumption of living indefinitely on. Thus, while the evils of the uncertainty are certain, the benefits that might arise depends on such a temper and exercise of mind as few will maintain. But what warning there is in this very consideration !

Again ; the “*days*” have a character of “*evil*,” in that they are, in some views, tending to worse. It is an evil quality in a thing that it should naturally bring on something not so good. But the passing days necessarily (supposing life protracted) carry us on towards those of infirmity, decline ; “*In which thou shalt say, there is no pleasure in them.*” A traveller’s narrative sometimes tells how the advanced stages in a pleasant tract were sensibly bringing him on toward a dreary and inhospitable one. At a distance he could perceive signs of what was before him, and this threw a degree of gloom on the yet agreeable stages ; the good was less a good, as warning him of worse before him. The “*days*” in other respects also tend to worse, since, in advancing, they render improvements, reforms, more difficult ;—anything wrong in habits,—opinions,—principles,—harder either to detect or overcome.

We add but one more character of “*evil*,” (in a natural view it is such,) namely, all the days partake of death. It is not wholly a figure to say that we “*die daily*.” Though death is one momentary circumstance—the absolute *loss* of life—yet the *consumption* of life is a fact very much related to it. Though life, as strictly and precisely opposed to death, mean the state of being animated, yet we hardly consider ourselves as using a figure, when we speak of a man’s

life as the whole duration of his animated existence on earth ; and as parallel to *that* sense of life, the consumption of it is obviously a kind of death ; and each of the days is effecting, as it passes, a part of that process of destruction. These perishing successive portions are all relative to the mortal consummation toward which they are leading. The case would be totally different with a being that was never to die ; the departing portions of duration, having no such relation to a mortal end, would not partake of the character of death. Enoch and Elijah did not "*die daily*."

All these views should contribute to enforce the precept and admonition, "*redeem the time*." "*Redeem ;*" if we were to fix our attention for a moment on this word, in its strict sense, the thought would occur, how many persons have wished, or may now be wishing, or will hereafter wish, that they could literally "*redeem the time*," and with what profound regret that it is impossible. No regret for the irretrievable loss of fortune, or of empire, has ever been so deep, as some have felt for the loss of their time. "All the treasures or glories of the world, if I possessed them, would I give to recover a few years—one year—one month ;" but vain, desponding, despairing wish ! But can it be, that many, now the subjects of the admonition and warning, will, in future periods, come to this state of vain wishes and desperate grief ?—will feel so, with respect to time, which at this hour is yet before them unconsumed,—time that may yet be redeemed, as it comes successively ? That seems so melancholy to think ! yet it will be so !

But for *us*,—can any earnestness—any vigilance—any exertion—any prayers, be too much for preventing that such a state of feeling should be ours? And if, in the case of some of us, a large amount of it has already gone unredeemed, what should be the effect of reflecting on that?

“*Redeeming the time.*” The “*evils*” incident to “*the days*,” as described above, render it a very difficult thing effectually to “*redeem the time.*” They form a grand conspiracy to waste and devastate it,—to seize and plunder it from us. But this all enforces so much the more the precept, the obligation, the necessity to “*redeem*” it. If the people of any tract or colony suffered disasters and losses in their valuable stores or plantations (by fire, tempest, or plunder), would their right policy be to be careless of the residue? So we,—the more the days are beset by things that grievously invade them, disturb them, waste them,—the more careful and zealous should we be to save and improve all that we can. Let not the enemies have to show *all* our most valuable substance as the wrecks, or the spoils, of their warfare upon our life. To this end, it is of the highest importance that time should be (if we express it so) a REALITY in our perception and estimate; that we should verify it as an actual something, like a substance to which we can attach a positive value, and see it as wasting or as improved, as palpably as the contents of a granary, or as the precious metals. The unfortunate case with us is, that *time* is apprehended but like *air*, or rather like *empty space*, so that, in wasting it, we do not see that we are destroying or misusing

a *reality*. In losing, in wasting a day, or an hour, we have no perception like what we should have in burning, or in throwing down a stream, a valuable article that is tangible and visible ; (a useful implement, an instructive book, a quantity of corn, pieces of money.) But a great object is, to attain a perception of something like this. The simple way to attain this sense of time's reality is, the habit of thinking what could be *done* in so much time. Time is equivalent to what could be done or gained in it. A portion of it thrown away, therefore, should be accounted of as just that thrown away, which could have been gained by improving it ; *that* was contained in the time, (by possibility.) If a person were so foolish as to throw away a valuable piece of money into a pit, or the sea, he does not indeed *literally* throw away anything but the metal ; but *virtually*, he throws away whatever best thing it would have purchased ; (as bread, clothing, refreshments, or medicines for the sick,—an instructive book, &c.) When this habit is acquired, of verifying time as a reality, small pieces and fragments of it will acquire a perceptible value never apprehended before. And then the painful reflection may often occur, “How rich I have been,—had I but been aware of it !”

Another main thing toward “*redeeming time*,” is this,—to keep established in the mind, and often present to view, certain important purposes or objects that absolutely *must* be attained. There is one thing that to all men establishes and imposes itself, in this decided manner, independently of their will, that is, the necessity of the provision for animal subsistence.

But are there not other things as really necessary, though in order to feel them such, there must be thought and conscience? For example :—that there is some considerable discipline and improvement of the mind, (including, too, the other minds under a man's care) ;—some moderate, and if possible, considerable attainment of divine knowledge ;—some measure of the practice of religious exercises ;—and there is the “*one thing needful*,” in its whole comprehensive magnitude. Now, let such great objects be fixed in purpose, as having a positive and absolute claim, and be very frequently thought of, as having it,—and they will greatly magnify, generally, the value of time in our estimate ; they will, in numberless instances, limit and reduce the claims of other objects, which would else be admitted ; and so, keep things in their proper proportions. And, they will put in their claims to very many little portions and particles of time, that else would be carelessly surrendered to chance, fancy, or indolence ; like the apostles, under the Lord's direction, they will “*collect the fragments that nothing be lost*.”

That time be regarded in an inseparable connexion with eternity, is the grand principle for redeeming it ; to feel solemnly that it is really for eternity, and has all the importance of this sublime and awful relation. This latter is conceived of, as having, in every portion of it (if we may speak of portions) something mysteriously grand and solemn. But the relation is such, that much of that solemn quality comes, pervades hither, through our time, in all its portions, whether we be sensible of it or not. And reversely, if this is

unfelt and disregarded, and our time here be suffered to be vain, wasted, or evil, it will throw, in a disastrous manner, an effect of this, its quality, into eternity.

It might be a striking and alarming reflection, suggested to a man who has wasted or ill applied a given portion of his time ;—“ Now the time has gone backward into the irrevocable past, but the effect of it, from the quality you have given it, is gone forward into eternity—and since you are going thither, how will you meet and feel the effect there ? ” Those that are gone thither, experience and verify the effect there, of the quality they gave to their time here. What may be considered to be the effect felt there, of many particular single portions of the time that has been passed here ? of particular days ; particular hours ? It would be wise and salutary to fix this thought distinctly and specially on portions of our passing time,—“ This day is going—but going *thus*, what influence is it throwing forward, beyond my mortal sphere ? Shall I find it in light or in gloom, in bitterness or in joy, elsewhere ? ”

The proper conclusion of the whole is,—that nothing short of the redemption of the soul, is the true and effectual redemption of time ; and this object gives the supreme rule for the redeeming of time. Let us apply this rule, and implore the divine Spirit to make its authority irresistible upon us. There may be in some senses an admirable redemption of time, yet this grand object be lost ! It is quite afflictive, sometimes, to think of such examples ; great and systematic industry in useful occupations ;

—wonderful attainments in knowledge, learning, science ;—indefatigable prosecution of schemes and operations, by which mankind are benefited ;—but, all the while, the essential interests of the soul neglected ! How melancholy, to have made so admirable an use of time for all the purposes but the supreme one !

Our concern is, that the great Redeemer may train us to redeem our time in the very process of his redeeming our souls.

May 22, 1823.

LECTURE IX.

THE DIVINE GOODNESS A MOTIVE TO REPENTANCE.

ROMANS ii. 4.

“The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

It is not our purpose to dwell, in any formal manner, on the doctrine of repentance; its nature; the distinction of its different kinds; or the conditions of its being effectual. Nor is there any need to insist on so plain a truth as, that repentance is necessary to all men; for nothing hardly would appear more impious than for any one to come forward and say, “I need no repentance.”

But there is another consideration, of very grave importance, namely—that all men will certainly come to repentance; that there are causes in existence, and will be in operation, which will infallibly enforce repentance of some kind, at some time. In this view it is a very solemn thing to look at men (classes or individuals)—the gay and thoughtless—impious—hardened in iniquity—self-righteous—indifferent professors—and think, “You will certainly repent!—your repentance may be in vain—of an unavailing kind—too late, but it will

certainly come! You may think not of it, may make light of the admonition; but it is in reserve; it *will* come; and *when* it comes, what a change!" And let it be suggested, the repentance that absolutely will be enforced, sometime or other, whatever it shall be deficient in, will at least have the pain, the grief; and the pain the greatest, if it be an unavailing repentance. There are, then, causes in reserve that will enforce repentance, even on the most careless and hardened.

But we would speak of reasons that should enforce it *now*; persuasive reasons, conducive reasons. There are many such; and surely, what has just now been represented should be a powerful one. If ultimate repentance is inevitable, under an irresistible, and what may be, a terrible, power, how desirable it should not be left to be caused so; but be effected under the persuasive influence of more gracious causes! And it becomes peculiarly desirable that these should be the prevailing influences, to work repentance, when we consider it as a prolonged, a habitual sentiment and exercise of the soul. For we are not considering repentance exclusively in a limited character of one great temporary act; as a part of that revolution which we call *conversion*; but as a feeling which is to be continually renewed, and maintained in exercise through the whole course of life. It ought to be so maintained, unless the remembrance of sin ought to be otherwise than painful. It should be so habitual, unless a man perfectly ceases to be a sinner. We must beware of the delusive notion of a repentance once for all;

confined to one particular period,—as if it put all right for perpetuity, and gave a final opiate to the conscience. Not even the assurance of pardon through Jesus Christ is to extinguish the sentiment of repentance; unless it be a proper effect of Christian faith, that a man should cease to care, in the smallest degree, that he has been a sinner, and is still a sinner.

But we repeat, if repentance is to be prolonged, a habitual exercise of religion, it is to be wished that the causes acting on the mind to excite the sentiment, should be much of the gentler order. And of these, the chief, (if, indeed, it do not comprehend them all,) is “*the goodness of God*,” manifested, acknowledged, and felt. Contemplate, then, that “*goodness*.” It may be considered in the grand, comprehensive view, of all the beneficence that he has poured over this universe,—all the good that he has conferred on this world since the creation,—all that is displayed in nature, providence, and the great work of redemption.

But we would rather direct the attention to the divine goodness in some more special views. For example :—contemplate it as beheld in the same view with the deserts of man,—the two visions close together,—a broad manifestation of both, in comparison. Look at the general appearance and character of each; are these in due relation? Fix on any particular parts, to see how they answer to each other; whether they reflect each other’s brightness and heavenly quality. What is it in man that is adequately correspondent to that goodness? Is it a humble, constant sense of

dependence?—an affectionate admiration of his beneficence?—a mighty attraction towards him?—a conformity of spirit, and incessant solicitude to be still more conformed? Is it an aversion to all that he disapproves? Look at any of the particulars of his goodness,—his constant provision—his watchful protection—his compassionate care of weakness. What corresponds to these? His rays of instructive wisdom falling on man,—what corresponds? Is it clear, unperverted reason?—perfect love of truth?—anxiety to be taught? His shining forth on them, a sovereign pattern of sanctity; his shining forth in an economy of redemption,—what does this very thing *imply* that there is in man to answer to it? Thus, let “*the goodness of God*” be contemplated relatively and comparatively to the character and disposition of man.

Behold it again in the same view with the manifestation of his mind against sin,—the expressions of denunciation accompanying his holy law, and mingled with all his communications to man,—how many they are, how decisive, how solemn, and at the same time, just! And yet, notwithstanding, the world around us is not made an unmingled scene of vindictive execution; sinful men are not, in every path and dwelling, crushed under the falling judgments of Heaven. There is an immense dispensation of benefits. This is instead of the expression of his displeasure and denunciation, being (if we may so speak) embodied in a practical dispensation of inflictions. Those just denunciations are sent conjoined with favours, with mercies exceeding the number of the formidable sen-

tences—of the expressions that he is offended. It would seem as if he would not send his rebukes or threatenings but by the hands of friends, bearing tokens of kindness and beneficence, while they convey the messages of displeasure. “*It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.*” The case, then, is such that the divine denunciations against sin, and the actual prevalence of sin in men, in *us*,—being considered together,—no such measure of indulgence and bounty could have been expected as that which is actually experienced.

View this divine goodness in the light of being contemporary—being at the very same time with—each sin in our long succession of offences. Advert to any distinguishable sin in particular, in its time, its moment ; there was goodness experiencing then : advert to the next, and the next,—at *that* time there was still “*the goodness of God,*” and in various ways at once. Could this, at any such moment, have been denied, — could it have been boldly said (suppose in excuse for sin,) “I am experiencing no ‘*goodness of God*’ just now ?” No ; at whatever sinful moment, there was a diversity and complication of the exercise of “*the goodness of God.*” So that downward to this hour, the series of the divine goodness may be counted by the succession of a man’s sins. Not one sin, small or great, but immediately, close by it, were acts and proofs of this goodness. If this had been realized to thought, what a striking and awful admonition ! Each and every sin a testimony, a representative of goodness ; and what a wonder, that the train of goodness should still persist to go on !

And this may suggest another idea ; that is, of realizing this goodness by the supposition of its being withdrawn. Deprivation is sometimes the most effectual way of verifying that a thing was,—and what, and how much it was. Think, if God were to take this method of making us sensible whether he has exercised goodness toward us ! He might begin, at one point, and at another, to diminish, to withhold, to withdraw. He might cause his bounty to recede on every side of the sphere of our interests. On one side a diminution, a withdrawment just enough to be felt at first ; but speedily more—and still more ; the same operation on another side of our interests—something still departing day after day !—things we had scarcely thought of as gifts or mercies, leaving incurable pain, or want, behind !—our condition becoming more and more distressed and miserable, till we sunk in death, and a death without consolation or hope ! Or, instead of this gradual process, a sudden general deprivation. Now what would all this be, but merely the withdrawment of the Divine Goodness ? Estimate that goodness, then, as on the supposition of its being withdrawn:

We may add, as peculiarly pertinent to our text, that “*the goodness of God*” is to be viewed in its character of patience and longsuffering. All his lengthened indulgence, his train of favours—what should we in conscience deem it to have been for ? What, but that there might be increasing gratitude, devotedness, wisdom, and service ? And when has there been such a degree of these, that it was anything but mere goodness in God to continue his

favours? In the failure of these (that is, of gratitude, devotion, service, &c.) what should we deem the lengthened indulgence to have been for, but that, at length, a mighty repentance should awake in the soul? But has *this*, too, failed? Then how great "*the goodness*" as longsuffering and patience!

But what is this "*goodness*" of longsuffering still for? Surely our text is the answer. "*It leadeth thee to repentance,*" still waits for the same,—persuades to the same. And thither the divine "*goodness*" should lead, in all the views we have attempted to represent it in. Does not all this goodness most emphatically reproach our ingratitude? Does it not expose sin as a thing inexpressibly malignant and hateful? Does it not show that this is a cause for grief, far, far beyond all others? Does it not show that pardon of this, and deliverance from this, are the greatest blessings to be sought, or named, or thought of, under Heaven? But these blessings can come to no man's soul, separately from repentance.

And it is "*the goodness of God*" that still presses this repentance upon us. It seems to plead and expostulate. "Would you not desire to be in unity with such a Being?" But this cannot be without repentance. "Would you not deem that which has kept you from his love and communion, your most fatal enemy?" Then would you not repent of having entertained it? "Oh, what have you been listening to, while his goodness has pleaded in vain? Can you expend your sorrow on trifling ills, and be indifferent about this? What state, what society are you fit for, and will be fit for, hereafter, if you would

not be even passionately earnest to be restored to him? Would you not fervently implore one more manifestation of his "*goodness*," in an act of his almighty power, to break down the separation which estranges you from him? How can you even endure to experience his "*goodness*" any longer, if it is to be in vain? What but an insufferable reproach can every new manifestation of it be? And what is that goodness to lead to, if not to repentance. Think, what there can be else for it to lead to. Shall it be to successive scenes, and stages, and varieties of vanity? Shall it be to the very thing itself, even sin, which it should lead to repentance of? Shall it be, to contempt of God? Think what a fearful power of evil it is, that can cause the very "*goodness of God*" to lead in such a way!

But the mind says to itself, when conscience is uneasy, "There *must*, there *shall* be repentance." *Must* it be so? *Shall* it be so? Then what is to lead to it, if not the "*goodness of God?*" How, and by what, is it counted upon, as to be brought to pass? Such a question should be plainly answered by the neglectful, delaying spirit that gives itself this assurance. What *else* than "*the goodness of God*" is to lead to repentance? What is to be a greater force, and a better force to accomplish the effect? Would a man calmly reckon on severe and terrific causes? On affliction — calamities — judgments? Would he say, "*Those* will make me feel, though divine indulgence cannot? Thou wilt affright and terrify me, and '*set my sins in order before me*;' and, till they come, I must be content that '*the*

divine goodness' be in vain." Benevolence would pray that those awful visitations might speedily arrive, if nothing else can suffice ; even *that* were the "*goodness of God*," though in so different a form. But what a state of mind it would be, that could resign itself to such a calculation, to such a hope ! And, besides, how is the genuineness to be assuredly known, of a repentance wrought by suffering, by fear and terror ? how, unless there were space and scope given afterward to prove that the "*goodness of God*" affects the soul, and prolongs the salutary contrition when the terrors shall have remitted ? But, besides, even this method of severe goodness may be forborne, when a long train of its benignant favours have been disregarded. Even terrors may not be sent till it is too late. Think, at the same time, even if a genuine and salutary effect might be calculated upon, as to be wrought by terror and suffering, what infatuation it would be to leave it to be so accomplished,—that which there is now indulgent goodness adapted to accomplish !

But, is it still this indulgent goodness that is counted upon, as to work repentance ? prolonged goodness,—more and greater goodness,—while thus far, that goodness fails ? But is there not enormous presumption in thus making sure of its prolongation ? Is there not presumption too, and absurdity, in building on resolutions, to make a contrary use, some time, of that goodness, to what has been deliberately made of it hitherto ? What good and powerful principle is expected to spring up in the heart, in the meantime, to turn it so certainly and so easily to its

Divine Benefactor? And even, if it could be certain that the divine goodness would be efficacious—after being still longer trifled with—think how certain it would be also that a great aggravation of bitterness and remorse would be added, by the very circumstance of having trifled with that goodness so much longer.

But again; the prolonged trifling with it, tends, naturally and powerfully, to an effect directly the contrary of repentance,—naturally and powerfully, we say; it does so by mere habit, if there were nothing more. It does so, by establishing a heedless kind of notion (or rather a habit of feeling without thought), as if all the good we receive were just what belongs to our being and nature—only what it is proper for us to have, since we exist,—something due to our condition, rather than any direct bounty of God. It does so, by turning many of God's mercies, in succession, to a wrong use—and every such instance, being a sin, puts us further from him—adds to the thickness of the separating wall. It does so, by creating a delusive sense of impunity. It may do so, by introducing into the mind an express and even speculative undervaluation of the divine mercies, admitted and cherished to do away the sense of guilt. It may at length do so, (that is, harden the spirit,) by bringing upon it, from the infliction of God himself, a judicial insensibility. But, conceive the state of a soul hardened under "*the goodness of God!*" No longer even a perception of his mercies, as such,—a fixed impenetrable ingratitude,—an established, habitual repellency to all his attractions,

—a cessation nearly of regret for not being at peace with him. The man's mind made up, as it were, just to seize and enjoy as much temporal good as God will *permit* him (not *give* him) during the remainder of the brief space of life, and leave all that is to follow to be as it may.

Above all things, we should dread, and pray against such a fatal consequence of "*the goodness of God.*" And if there be in any, a consciousness of any degree of it, no words are strong enough to express the alarm and earnestness that should be felt.

Consider, in conclusion, how happily the sentiment of repentance, from a sense of "*the goodness of God,*" mingles and harmonizes with all the noblest and most delightful sentiments of religion,—with gratitude, holy reverence, and zeal,—and with the aspirations to a better life where there shall be no more sin.

June 19, 1823.

LECTURE X.

THE DURABILITY OF THE EARTH CONTRASTED WITH
HUMAN MORTALITY.

ECCLESIASTES i. 4.

*“ One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh :
but the earth abideth for ever.”*

THIS place of our abode, or rather our sojourn, this earth, has many things tending to beguile us out of reflection, to lull and sink us into unconcern. But it has some things fitted to awaken us to thought and apprehension. This should, in all reason, be the effect of such circumstances, and facts, as force on our attention the contrast between the duration of the earth itself and that of our abode on it ;—a duration, in the one instance, coming down from a vast remoteness of antiquity,—and extending onward through unknown ages ;—in the other instance, a duration nearly imperceptible, in the whole view of the lapse of time ; like that of a bubble floating down upon a great stream. We repeat ; things that serve to expose and verify the greatness of this contrast, ought to have an awakening effect. Especially, when we consider, that there is no circumstance belonging to our sojourn on earth so

interesting as—that we must leave it. And most directly related to our leaving it, is our speed in passing through it.

And there are many things to illustrate this comparison, and force our thoughts upon it. History itself;—*why* is history, but because the generations of men are gone? We want to know something of them, and to converse with them, as a former world of men. And history tells us of one generation, and of another, that has passed away, leaving not a living “rack behind.” In a few hours of this retrospective contemplation, a whole age of the race is seen off the world; followed by another, and another. We may look till we are quite weary of the long succession—confounded by the rapidity of endless change, and almost mortified to see the race thus continually reduced to vanity and dust. And yet here remains the very same world; “*the earth abideth for ever* ;” and what it retains of them all is just, literally, so much mould as their dissolved bodies have yielded! a substance, however, which it contained before they existed.

It is obviously suggested here, that we have another illustration of the text in places of interment, that have been such for ages. The earliest of the generations that have terminated their earthly existence, are gone beyond memory or tradition. Of a subsequent, but still early period, you find some two or three half-obliterated monumental inscriptions; with them was contemporary a whole generation,—deposited there in their season, but totally forgotten and unknown. In greater number

there are dates of a later generation, still far gone in the past. And so you come down, at last, to the *recent* grave and tomb.

But the fields, the hills, the streams, around, are the same. The sun shines on the spot,—the shadows of the clouds pass,—the rains and snows fall,—the grass and plants grow,—the same. And also *living men*, young and old, are seen, on a fine sabbath morning, walking about, or standing in social parties,—or leaning, in perfect unconcern perhaps, against the monumental stones,—just thus it was in the former ages. It is very striking to observe this last circumstance (especially in some rural burying ground) and to think that *these*, (many of them probably the descendants of those mouldering under their feet,) that these are the “*generation*” next to pass away. The time approaches when they also will be gone; and still the world of Nature will remain the same, not united with their doom,—not sympathetic with their declining—their sickness—their growing old—their dying.

But not only the abodes of the *dead*,—those of the *living* also, may yield illustration of the contrast, those of them which were built in a former age; or, take them collectively, in a village, town, or city; as this city. How many successions of the inhabitants, since it became a populous city! Would it be an extravagant conjecture that seven or eight times as many persons have died in it, as are at this hour living in it? We are setting out of view, in the calculation, the circumstance that many of the houses have perished and been replaced by new ones. We

take it in the mass, as if it were one great abode. But think, now, of the whole population having been so many times changed! It requires thought; because the change, being gradual, is at no one time presented in its full magnitude. Were it in the nature of things that there should be, at one grand sweep, the removal of so vast a number, repeated at the average period of an age of man, the event, and the succession of such events, would have an overwhelming awfulness. But what is in *effect* equal to this, takes place, and but feebly excites attention. But think, sometimes, when you traverse the city, how many entire generations have walked along some of those streets. Or look over it from one of the neighbouring eminences, and think of the difference between the scene of all its busy crowd,—and of that mightier multitude of which not one being now mingles with that crowd! But the hill is the same, the general landscape the same; “*the earth abideth for ever!*”

These are some of the more general, and broadly obvious, exemplifications of the fact noted in the text. We hope it will not be deemed fanciful, if we should pursue the illustration through some more particular and minute matters of observation.

There may be many things *incidentally* suggesting themselves to reflecting minds, that will strongly enforce the consideration of the brevity of life, as contrasted with the permanence of the scene in which it is passed. Reflections of this character may occur under occasional and transient states of feeling,—excited at one time by objects that would not excite

them at another. But we should think it must have happened to many, or to most men, to have *this* reflection excited at the view of some object or other,—“How much longer this has been—or shall be—than I—or any now living man.”

This recently occurred to myself, very forcibly, in observing some projections of rock, at the basis of a precipice by the sea,—alternately washed and left by the tide. These objects had been noticed in a former season, (perhaps without the reflection occurring, though so natural a one;) their appearance was exactly the same—and the thought suggested itself;—“How many ages the ocean has fretted and foamed against these blocks—how many ages before any person now living was here to observe them. Here, in this perpetual encounter with the mighty element, they have remained with little alteration—and nearly thus will remain for centuries to come;—but where will the present spectator be? In comparison with this, what a brevity of duration is that allotted to our mortal existence!”

There are, as we said, *occasional states* of feeling, in which the reflection, so suggested, comes with vivid impression. And it were well to cultivate that reflective habitude through which the mind should be susceptible of instructive and solemn suggestions and impressions from any and all objects. To a mind so habituated, the transiency of life, the “*passing away of the generations*,” will be forcibly suggested by the view of such things as mountains (“*everlasting hills*”), massive rocks, ancient trees, the never-tiring, never-ending, action of the sea, and the solid

structures of human labour. Well may such objects make an impression of contrast with man, when we find them in Scripture taken as emblems to represent the unchangeableness and eternity of God.

And we may observe, it is the manifest intention of the Divine Spirit, as shown in the sacred writings, that we should be taught to find emblems, in the world we are placed in, to enforce solemn instructions upon us.

Thus, the character of permanence in objects we behold, may admonish us of the brevity of our mortal life. The reflections arising to impress this admonition may be in various forms. For instance,—while we are beholding an object which has had a long duration, the reflection may be,—“How many have beheld it who are not now in the world !” In some cases, the thought will carry us up to a remote antiquity, when barbarous tribes inhabited or wandered about the place ; and down through all the changes of the people in a long series of ages. “Here they have stood, or walked,—solitary individuals, or associates. Their eyes have fixed on that object—with attention—without attention—with words of remark upon it. What various countenances have faced it ! these countenances when in the bloom and sparkle of youth ; and again when faded and withered in age. And a still successive and renewed race have been here, and beheld this object, while the preceding generations disappeared and were forgotten. *They* might go,—*it* departed not. *It* remained obvious to each following tribe of dwellers or visitants ; and with a hard, unchanged aspect of entire

independence and indifference as to all. What an assemblage! what a spectacle! if there could be a visionary recall and exhibition of them all! And now, at last, *we* tread this same ground, and fix our eyes on this same object, on which millions of looks have been fixed; *we*, too, shall disappear,—and *it* will still be there!”

The reflection may include the ideas of all the various personal qualities—states of mind and character,—and condition altogether, of this unknown long succession. “Depravity has been here, in how many forms! Misery, of how many kinds and degrees! Visions of anticipation—deeply pondered schemes—fluctuations of hope and fear—thoughtlessness and consideration—practical atheism and devout sentiment! All this has passed away—and here is the object still, to which all this *was*, once, present!”

And then to think, there is yet to come *more* of all this, *to be* present to it—after we shall see it no more. What a train of sinners yet, but also, we trust, of saints, are to reside, or pass and repass, within sight of that pile of rocks,—that mound of earth, raised perhaps by the Romans or the Britons,—or that ancient massive tower. For *these*, as settled features of the earth, will “*abide*” while “*one generation passes away, and another comes.*”

In a solitary and contemplative state of the mind, the permanent objects give the impression as if they rejected and scorned all connexion with our transitory existence—as if we were accounted but as shadows passing over them,—as if they stood there

but to tell us what a *short day* is allotted to us on earth,—to proclaim the transitoriness of man,—to frown upon our thoughtless feeling and self-gratulation, as if there were to be great length in life—and on the presumption of our calculations and schemes. (And, indeed, how just and pointed a reproach on a creature of flesh and blood, standing perhaps on some great rock, and joyously anticipating a great length of life! Let him look at what he stands on!) 'Tis as if they stood there the monuments of many past generations, and were appointed to be also ours,—as if appointed to witness the whole lapse of time, and would take no account of so diminutive a space of it as ours,—as if they had nothing to do with the present and passing generation of men. They strike the thoughtful beholder with a character of gloomy and sublime dissociation and estrangement from him.

It is true that the altering effect of time is visible on many of the objects thus contrasted with us by their permanence. But the extreme slowness of that alteration serves to display again that contrast, and to enforce the instruction. For example, the gradual decay of some mighty, ancient, structure,—or of some magnificent cedar or oak,—the working away of the very rocks on the sea-coast. The *work of ages* is seen even in the smoothing and rounding of the pebbles, there, or in the channel of a stream. The change, the decay, in many of these cases, is such, that there is no human witness of the alteration, that is, of the *process*. The effect has been wrought, but so slowly and imperceptibly, that no man can say that he has seen its *progress*. The man

that has looked on the objects in his childhood, can hardly, in his most advanced age, say that he perceives any difference. But then let him turn and look at his fellow mortals, such of them as remain alive ! He can recall the image of the childhood of even the oldest of them. He has seen them through the progress of the change ; and a far greater number he has seen out to the last change. And then, let him observe himself ! While the sea-beaten rock, or the massive tower, or even the great oak, presents to him the same aspect, as when he was a youth or a child, what is the case with *him* ? How could *he*, by his appearance, be known for the same ? And how does he know himself to be the same ? Is it by his withered countenance—his infirmities—his pains—his laborious walking—his extinguished spirits—his prospects vanished ?

But we may take the impressive instruction without bringing the whole length of life thus into the contrast. It may have happened to us to fix our attentive look on some such permanent objects, and after a moderate interval—a few years—to come to behold them again. *They* are seen just the same ; but even within that space, *we* may have experienced every great change. Our condition in life,—our health,—the state of our social relations, may have become in the meantime very different ; projects ended,—prospects surrendered,—we are quite in another stage of life. We may look at the object, and say,—“ So, and so, I was designing or expecting, when I saw this last (and this great tree, or ancient arch)—then I possessed—*now* I have lost—” How

happy if we can say,—“ *Then* I was all for this transitory state,—now I am earnestly occupied for another ! ”

At any rate, whatever may have been the particular course of experience, it would betray a thoughtless spirit, if some striking reflections should not be excited. The man should at least be reminded, “ So much of my life has irrevocably passed away since, and while the space has made no perceptible difference to this object which I behold again, it has made a most important one to *me*. A few more such spaces at the most (which will still make no difference to *it*,) will finish my mortal term—perhaps one such,—perhaps much less.” And, possibly, in the former instance, he viewed it with some to whom the subsequent space of time has made all the difference of life and death ! *It* is here still, and just as it then was,—where are *they* ?

The great general instruction from all this is,—how little hold—how little absolute occupancy we have of this world. When all the scene is evidently fixed to *remain*, *we* are under the compulsion to go. We have nothing to do with it, but as passing from it. The generation “ *comes* ” but to “ *pass away*, ” seeing another following it closely under the same destination. Men may strive to cling—to seize a firm possession—to make good their establishment—resolve and vow that the world *shall* be theirs. But it disowns them,—stands aloof ;—it will stay, but they must go. It seems to declare to them, that it is no more for *them*, than it has been for the countless preceding generations ; *those*, in their time, wished to

appropriate it, but what is become of *them*? It warns us that it was designed for *us*, but just as much as it was for all those departed tribes; and we may consider what *they* have of it now. It signifies to us, that equally to *all* it will yield *one* matter of permanence—just one, and no more, and that is,—a grave. If *that* enduring possession of the earth will content us, *that* is secure. In all other senses of possession it will eject us. Men, in their earnest adhesion to it, may raise mighty works of enduring stability—towers, palaces, strongly built houses, as if they absolutely would connect themselves with the world's own prolonged duration. Well! they may do so; and the earth will retain *these*, but will expel *them*. They may construct what they please that shall *stay*; it is *their own absence* that will be enforced. It is their concern whether they can beguile themselves to fancy, that in the permanence of such proud representatives of themselves, they can actually hold, when gone, any real and gratifying possession of the earth.

But should not the final lesson be, that the only essential good that can be gained from the world, is that which can be carried away from it? Alas! that mere sojourners—beings of transition—travellers rapidly passing away, should be mainly intent on obtaining that which they must leave,—doom themselves to depart in *utter* deprivation—when their inquisitive glance over the scene should be after any *good that may go with them*,—something that is not fixed in the soil, the rocks, or the walls.

Let us look on the earth in the spirit of this

inquiry, "What has the bounteous Creator placed here?—what has the glorious Redeemer left here, that I may, by his grace, seize and take with me, and find it invaluable in *another* world?" It will then be delightful to look back, with the reflection, "I could not stay on that earth. I saw but a little while its enduring objects,—its grand solidities,—I saw them but to be admonished that I should remove. I have left them maintaining their unchanging aspects ; but in my passage I descried, by the aid of the Divine Spirit, something better than all that they signified to me was no possession for *me*—I seized the pearl of great price, and have brought it away."

September 25, 1823.

LECTURE XI.

THE THOUGHTS AND WAYS OF GOD CONTRASTED WITH
THOSE OF MAN.

ISAIAH lv. 8, 9.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

LIKE many of our former texts and subjects, the present one has been suggested by the circumstances of the times. About half a year since, the situation and prospects of things in one part of Europe connected great interest with the idea of the divine plan and prediction of overturning the state of the world (LECTURE vii). A prospect of mighty transactions and changes appeared to be opening; and not without considerable omens of such results, as might clear the way for important advantages to the condition of the world. Some of us were, perhaps, considerably sanguine (in spite of former sad disappointments); some much more doubtful; but probably none expected the course of events to proceed and to terminate (if we can say terminated) in the manner that it has done. “Terminated,”

indeed, we cannot say, if we speak in the terms of a comprehensive, extended view of the connexion and progress of human affairs. But one series,—one act of the drama—has closed in a way most deeply mortifying. There is one more gigantic and successful stride made by a monster in which all the powers of evil appear to have combined their strength and malignity ;—a system with its whole will, and immense means, resolved to crush and blast reason, and rights, and freedom, and religion too, regarded in any other character than as an instituted, political, and local superstition. And it seems as if the chief part of mankind really acknowledged this system for their divinity ; and regarded themselves as *made* for rendering homage in the debasement and prostration of body and soul, under despotism and religious imposture. If such a condition of things may be supposed to be gratifying to man's worst enemies, to even the Powers of Darkness themselves,—it must be very grievous to the friends of human happiness and improvement.

But then, all this being so, what do we think of next ? Have we begun to doubt whether there be a Supreme Governor over the universe, almighty, all-wise, and righteous ? Or can we suspect that the exercise of those attributes is withdrawn or suspended, for one moment, from even that very state of things which we wonder at and deplore ? A Christian should question himself sometimes, whether the sentiment he indulges may not approach or partake of such scepticism and impiety. No ! we say ; we give place to no such impiety ; we believe that, in

the exercise of all these attributes, He observes and interferes with, every instant, the facts and events which we are looking upon ; that he has his "*thoughts*" concerning them ; and his "*ways*" are according to those "*thoughts*." His "*ways*," to a certain extent, show what are his "*thoughts*?" Then, how true the text, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.*"

We may easily recollect some of the exemplifications. For instance ; in respect to events which we greatly desire, as plainly indispensable to a better state of the world, our thought is very apt to be this, — "Just now is the proper time ;" there is a peculiar necessity for it just now, at this precise juncture ; at this moment is a most favourable opportunity ; it is now a crisis in human affairs, in which just such an event is wanted to turn things the right way ; on its taking place a thousand important matters depend ; if it be not effected now, there will be a mighty augmentation of the difficulties ; new and almost insuperable, will come in the way ; and what immensity of labour and all kinds of cost will be thrown away ! And, besides, are there not various causes, combining to bring it to effect ? If it fail now, we may despair. But surely it must be in the decrees of Heaven that so indispensable a thing shall not fail ! Well ; the time and the course of events go on, and in the event prove that the Supreme Intelligence judged quite otherwise than we ! Were his "*thoughts*" right or not ? He has shown us, that whatever might depend on such an event taking

place, *that* which he had in his intention and decree did not depend upon it. He had in his "*thoughts*" something for the sake of which he could calmly pass by and lose *our* imagined opportune juncture, *our* momentous crisis,—he could disregard "the indispensable necessity," so imperative as it appeared in our "*thoughts*."

Our "*thoughts*" again are apt to be very confident in interpreting signs. It is tempting and interesting, beyond almost all things, to be looking into futurity. And we may think that we see very clearly the indications of what will and must come to pass. First, we are willing, on most partial grounds, to assume the event which we wish ; then, the signs of the times ; what can this portend and that, but the event we wish ? equivocal signs become determinate ; slight ones strong ; such as, in truth, but intimate a remote probability become presages of a speedy event. Any new circumstances, such as are not recorded, with their appropriate and verified consequences, in history or experience, are eagerly seized as indications. The train of preceding events, what should or can that be for or lead to ? There is, too, the interpretation of prophecy,—determinately to precise periods and events. Surely we do not wish to depreciate this study. But only consider how the progress of time has disposed of many confident interpretations of grave and learned men ! ("*My thoughts are not your thoughts.*") How many signs (so believed) have dispersed and passed away like clouds ! how many that rose fair and brilliant on the horizon, have proved but the portents of

tempest and devastation. God had his "*thoughts*" all the while. And, doubtless, these very signs, which we were so interpreting, had in them or inscribed upon them, the significance which, if we had possessed the high wisdom to discern, would have foreshown to us the contrary events to those we were anticipating. And, sometimes, when the time and events are past, we can see that we might have seen different indications from those we fancied we read ; we can see where and how we overlooked or mistook them.

Again ; our thoughts, fixing with desire and expectation on particular events, exaggerate the good that is to result, supposing those events to take place. It may be that the good that *should* follow, seems the reasonable and appropriate result. But we are apt to leave out of view the counteracting causes. We calculate as if man were far better, or more disposed to improvement, than he is. *Let* a desired event take place ; it may be quite undeniable that the consistent result, full, pure, and uncounteracted, would be immense good. But then, to frustrate it, there rises up the whole force of human depravity ; all that is adverse in the sensual, worldly, and irreligious spirit,—the corrupt self-interest of a multitude of men ;—ignorance, prejudice, and inveterate custom,—whatever direct power is in the hands of the wicked. The desirable thing is accomplished ; a noble fact in itself. A fine ship is built, and launched, and fitted out ; goes to sea upon an ambitious or golden adventure ; but is thrown by winds, or currents, or a pilot's ignorance or perverse-

ness, on a dangerous tract of rocks, or sands, or on a fatal coast ; or is tossed by storms, for weeks and months, and returns shattered almost to a wreck ; or is assailed by pirates, and taken. A revolution is effected in the south-west of Europe ; an auspicious event, leading to political and ultimately to religious liberty ; slavery is broken up ;—the inquisition abolished, some operation, ominous, distantly, of a decline and fall of a hateful and deadly establishment of superstition. Noble achievement ! delightful prospect ! and what next ? (Briefly recount the reversal.) Our “*thoughts*” contemplated pleasing visions of anticipation ; but the Divine Intelligence saw what was in man.

Again ; our “*thoughts*,” while we survey the course of human affairs, will sometimes advert directly to the conduct of the Great Governor. Inquisitively advert ; and sometimes almost presume to do it judicially. We wonder and say, Why does he act so ? why not thus ? Especially ;—why does he not interpose with a direct, and as it were with an immediate, act of his almighty power ; but seems thus to leave things to a long, slow struggle of conflicting causes ? Why not, for example, strike a tyrant with sudden and frightful death like Herod ? When an army is sent on a wicked enterprise, why might not He send, the second time, that messenger of the night that came down on the camp of Sennacherib ? He could, by some signal and irresistible demonstration, expose and explode a dreadful delusion and imposture (Popish, Mahomedan, or any other)—why should he not ? Why not, in

some great and critical juncture, sway and determine, by a direct influence, the minds of those on whose determinations so much of the welfare or misery of nations appears to depend? Why, in any great interest, are not the most expeditious methods adopted, and the most efficient means? Why does He, in many an instance, permit it to happen, that when there seems to be a happy concurrence of many causes, agents and efforts, in favour of some most important effect, *one* untoward incident should fall in to frustrate them all?

But in this temper of the thoughts, there is no end of the questionings that will arise; and, without a reverential restraint, such thoughts will soon border on impiety. For consider, what meaning our thoughts of this kind would be found to include, if examined. In the first degree it is this,—“I would have disposed of these things very *differently*, had it been possible for them to have been in *my* power.” In the next degree, the sentiment grows to be this, namely,—“It would have been much better if *He* had ordered them as he has not.” The mind dwells fondly on the idea how the course of events might have been, to the extent of something like a tacit reproach of his having disposed them otherwise. But to express such a sentiment (“He ought to have proceeded differently”—“He has ordered things wrong”), would be justly esteemed a horrid impiety. One has heard instances recited of such expressions, and involuntarily has listened to hear, in the sequel, of some signal judgment befalling the blasphemer. But, let a solemn caution be maintained, that no

“*thought*” be indulged which wants but the mere *expression* to be such an example !

We may note, at the same time, in the way of caution, one mode of avoiding this impiety, namely, the indemnifying ourselves for not daring a reproach to God, by a sentiment of aggravated vengeance against men. For example ; we see a people that might maintain the glorious privilege of freedom, and enter on a grand career of improvement, preferring to sink down to the degradation of the vilest slavery. The thoughts, directed to this spectacle, will advert at times to the Supreme Disposer, as concerned in such a case, with an emotion that would grow, if not over-awed, into a murmuring against him ; repressed by the sense of his awful majesty, it then goes out in a sentiment of intense indignation against men. And, in truth, simple justice warrants and dictates terms of most emphatical condemnation. But, still, there may be an absolute virulence, such as to exclude all mixture of benevolence. There may be a spirit essentially revengeful, which would delight and exult to wreak itself in plagues. Even the miserable herd of willing slaves may be the object of such a resentment as would wish them an aggravated weight of their chains, and the extremest bitterness of their cup. Too little allowance may be made for utter ignorance, and the debasing effect of inveterate superstition. It is not piety, nor justice, to save our allegiance to God, at the expense of man.

One more thing to remark on *our* “*thoughts*,” considered as relative to *His* “*thoughts*,” may be, our thinking,—“Why should he not reveal and explain

to us more of his "*thoughts?*" We have an idea—a presumption, that, notwithstanding the infinite disparity of intelligence, we yet are capable of comprehending much more than we do, of his own view of things, if he would explain to us ;—what would be a grand addition to the illumination of *our* minds, the enlargement of our "*thoughts,*" though but little be imparted of his. And we think, "Should we not then be more devout, as well as more wise ? Should we not be more acquiescent,—more resigned,—more approving,—more hopefully active,—and far more happy ? Should we not contemplate his attributes, and his procedure by a better light, and render him a more rational adoration ?" Now, to this, it is our proper answer,—that he has a right to require of us absolute faith, and that we should "*live by faith*" in the wisdom and righteousness of his government of the world. But, at the same time, it may be true that the human faculties are capable, even in the confined condition of this mortal existence, of receiving what would be a mighty addition to our information, according to *our* proportion. And the truth may also be, that the withholding of such knowledge—such enlarged explanation, is one of the positive evils inflicted on our fallen, sinful state ; by the same law as the infliction of pain, disease, and death. Such a denial of possible illumination is an affliction specially appropriate to the nature of the transgression which caused or constituted the fall, which was, in principle, an unhallowed reach at knowledge. It was then, as an infliction, peculiarly likely to form one particular in the vindictive doom on

the whole race. And so the fact of our "*thoughts*" not receiving more of the light and elevation of His "*thoughts*," is not to be regarded as a circumstance inevitable to the narrowness of our capacity, but as a part of our punishment and misery as a sinful race.

But still, after all, the grand thing is the immeasurable, the infinite disparity between the divine Mind and that of such a creature as man. For humiliation and instruction, let us sometimes dwell a while on the thought of this stupendous contrast. An infinite Spirit compared with us ! But the very idea of infinity overwhelms our faculties, even when applied to *space*. Still more when to an intelligent and active Power ! Still, we must endeavour to think. A Being to whose faculties there are no limits,—who has in such a nature existed from eternity,—has created all other existences,—perfectly knows all things, in all their relations, tendencies, and consequences, actual and possible ; therefore, whose "*thoughts*" of them are conformable to this all-perfect knowledge. Dwell upon such a view ! To eternity it may be incessantly dwelt upon, without even an approach to its awful immensity. Then, bring our thoughts, our thinking faculties, and that which they think, into comparison ! Even on this very topic itself, of the disparity ; think what is the proportion between what we think of it, and the fact as it is. And on all subjects, what must be, what can be, the proportion between his thoughts and ours ? Look out, sometimes, on the vast universe ; all that is seen and known to exist, and is probably existing. (worlds, systems, races, &c.)

and then think of Him that perfectly comprehends every one and all together ! then again, *his "thoughts"* and *ours* !

Now, then, is it not inevitable, that in the train of events in this world, his "*ways*" proceeding from his "*thoughts*" should be such as utterly confound our thoughts ? would not the contrary of this be most marvellous ? There must, therefore, be deep mystery and awful darkness, spread over much of his government of the world, as to our apprehension. There must, to us, be much of this darkness, even with respect to the more confined and immediate relations of events ; that is to say, in contemplating the divine procedure as limited to this world, or to a part of it. But, at the same time, we may not suppose that the divine government of this world is administered under such an exclusive economy ; but that it has relations, perhaps intimate ones, with other portions of his immense dominion. And if so, how much more still must many parts of his conduct transcend and confound our comprehension ! This topic, we are aware, cannot be brought with much of a distinct and satisfactory application to our view of things in this world. But that the fact is so, we cannot be permitted to doubt ; that is, that this economy of *extended relations* does exist. For it comports with our highest idea of the Creator's wisdom and glory, that his whole creation should be a *system*, combined through all its parts—a whole.

But then, again, *his "thoughts"* as compared with *ours* ! We need to dwell at times on such contemplations, to repress the murmuring and

inquisitive presumption of our thoughts, when they rise sometimes with a feeling which, in effect, is willing to prescribe a plan of government for the Almighty. We must submit, and surrender all to the sovereign wisdom and conduct of the "*blessed and only Potentate*." And indeed, to any real believer in his existence, the question might be plainly and boldly put, (put to his *sense*, not to say his *piety*)—"What would the consequence be, if *his ways* were to be conformed to your thoughts? With respect to any one great depending event in the world, if you might be permitted, unpunished, (allowing for a moment such a supposition)—permitted to prescribe positively, *how* it should be determined, *would you dare?*" If there could be such a momentary interference of any created being, would the consistences, would the continuity of the train, appointed by infinite wisdom and goodness, be preserved inviolate? Happy! that there can be no such interference. Happy, too, that the infinite wisdom and power in Him are combined with equal goodness. Such wisdom and power must, by a necessity of nature, be combined with goodness. And there are all the inspired declarations of it, and all the multiplicity of practical proofs. If it is true, that there is much in this world from which, taken separately, we could not infer that goodness, this is but a part of the darkness and mystery in which we are involved, and it is one of the strong exercises for devout faith. Here, however, there is one consideration that should never be lost sight of—namely, that God's government in this world is the government of a rebellious wicked race; there must, therefore, be an

exceedingly conspicuous manifestation of punitive justice. If our "*thoughts*" are ever claiming that there should be a display of *nothing but goodness*, in its most direct benignant form—let us look around the world, and up through all its ages !

Still we are to live in hope and confidence of better things and times. It is one fault and perversity of our "*thoughts*" to run into despair when events come contrary to our wishes and expectations. "Since this has come evil, it is vain to look any more for good : " while His "*thoughts*" are calmly extending onward to another stage in the progress of events—faithful to the promises then to be fulfilled, and the prophecies then to be accomplished. In the meantime, what a wonderful privilege it is—most wonderful, if we would but reflect—that we are permitted to express our "*thoughts*" to him in supplication ;—low and little and narrow as they are, they may, in this form, through our divine Mediator, be sent up to him. While we may not prescribe, or dictate,—we may *implore* with importunity and continual repetition. And in these petitions we are to join the great interests of nations and the wide world with our own personal ones.

And finally, to such humble and devout supplicants, is it not a glorious prospect, that they are going soon, where they shall comprehend far more and better ? where their own thoughts will become "*high as the heavens are above the earth ;*" where their contemplations and their understanding will be for ever brightening and enlarging under the effulgence of the Divine Intelligence ?

October 23, 1823.

LECTURE XII.

PART I.

THE CESSATION OF WAR, AN EFFECT OF THE PREVALENCE
OF CHRISTIANITY.

ISAIAH ii. 4. MICAH iv. 3.

“ They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks ; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

NOTWITHSTANDING any accompanying references, we cannot hesitate to take this for a prediction of times yet to come. For, evidently, it has never yet been fulfilled ; there has been nothing at all approaching or resembling a fulfilment. It is true that when the religion of Christ came to the world, it came with the spirit and principles of an all-pacific dispensation, (*“ On earth peace, good will towards men,”*) and true, that, in the degree of its actual prevalence, this has been the effect. But, how far is this from anything adequate to the terms of the prediction, which exhibit a bright and ample idea of this spirit and tendency of Christianity realized, reduced to fact, on the great scale ! Other prophecies also are given in as

large and absolute terms, of the same purport, and have been hitherto as little accomplished. And that ultimate efficacious prevalence of our Lord's religion, which all his disciples regard as certainly predicted, must necessarily include the cessation of *war*, include the fulfilment, on the grand scale, of the predictions that it shall cease. Thus far, we all know too well how little they have been accomplished. This flagrant stain of our history, (the history of our whole race,) has come down to the yet last page, and the greatest parts of its records have been written in blood.

We may contemplate, a few moments, this prominent character of all ages ; yes,—it is as conjoined with very nearly the beginning of our race, that we have to look upon this direful phenomenon. But how strange, for a creature, come fresh, living, and pure, from the beneficent Creator's hands ! The *least* that we *can* think of that original state of man is, that there must have been in his soul the principle of all kind affections,—all benevolent sympathies ; a disposition to be happier for the happiness of a kindred being ; a complacent delight in promoting it ; an exquisite sense of reciprocal right,—of benevolent justice ; no tincture of a wrongful selfishness ; a state of feeling that would have been struck with horror at the thought of inflicting suffering. And, from the creature thus originally constituted, all the race was to descend. Can such a nature ever rage with malignity and revenge, and riot in suffering and destruction ? Yet, in this original family, in the very first degree of the descent, war and slaughter began. Men may argue and quibble as long as it will amuse

them, against our notion of "*the Fall*,"—here was fall enough!—and demonstration enough! How deep!

We have to contemplate the primeval family spreading out in all directions. And we may be sure, that the dreadful spirit disclosed in the first slaughter, was not extinguished in that crime. Revelation gives us very little more of the antediluvian history than a brief deduction of genealogy. But the character of that period, is manifest from what is said at the end of it. (*"God saw that the wickedness of man was great, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,"* Gen. vi. 5. *"The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence,"* Gen. vi. 12.) And in the account we are told of some that "*became mighty men, men of renown.*" How, is it most likely that this might was displayed—this renown acquired? Partly, perhaps, in a war against savage beasts, but far more in another way—in the exploits of that "*violence which filled the earth,*" and doomed it to be overwhelmed. Assuredly, that universal "*violence*" would in no spot be limited to raging passions and fierce language; the corresponding deeds would be there! There was immeasurable room for men on the earth, but they *would* keep close enough for mutual aggression. We may venture to surmise that it was partly owing to the destruction by war, that the race did not spread more extensively over the earth. In so long a lapse of ages, with so strong a natural life in the individuals, and with probably much fewer diseases than now,—with all this in their

favour, it would seem they did not spread to this part of the globe—to Europe, as there is great and accumulating evidence to show ; for there have never been found any human bones in the deposits attributable to the deluge, in these countries, while it has lately been proved in a most singular and striking manner, that in this country there lived at that period the elephant, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, hyæna, &c., and some of the kinds of animals we now have here.

While we think of the deadly conflicts of those early ages, the idea may occur to us, of the peculiar atrocity of destroying a life which might, in the course of nature, have lasted so long. Living beings cloven down, or mortally pierced, or poisoned, or burnt, that might have lived seven or eight centuries,—for improvement,—for serving God,—for usefulness,—for whatever happiness there might have been in this world, or preparation for another. At length, another power invaded their fields of battle ; the furies of their warfare were quenched ; their trophies, fortresses, monuments, swept away. “ Their furies quenched,” we have just said ; but it would be no violently improbable imagination that they might burn and blaze at the very last ; for there have been examples to prove that an assemblage of many on one spot, where there is no escape from peril and destruction, may kindle with an insane rage against one another, and perish, as it were, before their time, by mutual violence. (Wreck of the French ship, *Medusa*.)

The world began anew, in the person and family

of a selected patriarch, whom alone "*the Lord had seen righteous in that generation.*" Now, then, for a better race,—if the human nature were intrinsically good, or corrigible by the most awful dispensations. It was by the descendants of the only faithful servant and friend of the Almighty found on earth, that the desolated world was to be repopled. A new surface was spread over the earth, concealing beneath their feet the entire race that had stained its former face with crimes and blood. Yet from beneath the ground, that enormous multitude of the victims of the divine justice, might seem, to thought, to utter a warning against renewing the scenes of violence. But all in vain ! The flood could not cleanse the nature of man ; nor the awful memory and memorials of it repress the coming forth of selfishness, pride, ambition, anger, and revenge.

The sacred history, after just recounting some successions of names in the different branches of the new race, limits its narrative to the origin and progress of what became the Jewish people—Abraham and his posterity. Their history, however, in proceeding downward, involves much of that of the surrounding nations. And some of the profane histories go far back into the period subsequent to the Deluge. And what is so conspicuous over all the view, as wars and devastations ? There is one portion of this tragical exhibition which we are to take out of the account of ordinary war ; namely, the war of extirpation against the Canaanites. This was by divine appointment for the punishment and destruction of transcendent and incorrigible wickedness ; and is to be placed nearly

on the same moral ground as God's immediate inflictions in the Flood, the land of Egypt, and Sodom and Gomorrah. But, setting this portion of the history aside, think of the long course of sanguinary conflicts within the boundary of the selected nation itself, between Israel and Judah. Besides the slaughters, of battle and massacre, within each separately, of these two divisions of that people,—add, all their wars with Syria and Egypt, with the Babylonian, Grecian, and Roman powers, closed finally, in that most awful catastrophe, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

Then glance a moment over the wider view of the whole ancient world ; as far abroad and as high up in time, as history has made it visible. The human race is exhibited, in some regions, in the form of numerous small states. But their smallness of size and strength was not the measure of their passions. What we are certain to read of them is, that they attacked and fought one another with the ferocity of wild beasts. By some ambitious "*conquering hero*" a great number of these were subdued and moulded together into a great kingdom, on one large space of the earth, and the same on another. And then with a tremendous clash, these empires came into conflict. And the ordinary and often repeated story, is, of vast tumultuary battles,—the exterminating rage of the victors,—territories overrun and reduced to a desert,—innumerable victims perishing. At length their empires, small and great, were swallowed up by one enormous power, which subdued them all, (within the greatest part of the

known world,) by a succession of martial operations, in which a greater number of human beings perished than would have been enough to constitute an empire. So effectually was this achieved, that at the time our Lord came on earth, there was a state of peace established (such as it was) to an extent over the world never known before. It was but a temporary calm ; and doubtless the storm was raging all the while in remote lands beyond the great circuit of the Roman empire.

But now if we could take one grand compass of view, over the earth and down through time from that period to this ! What a vision of destruction ! Think of all that tormented and desolated the earth, during the long period of the fall of the Roman empire ;—of that inundation of ravage and death, the progress and utmost extension of the Mahomedan power ;—of the mighty account of slaughter in the Spanish conquest of America ;—of the almost incessant wars among the states of civilized Europe, down nearly to the present hour. Think even of the bloody wars within our own island, especially on the border between its northern and southern divisions ;—the hundreds of remaining fortresses, monumental of war. And to complete the account,—as if the whole solid earth were not wide enough—the sea has been coloured with blood, and received into its dark gulf myriads of slain,—as if it could not destroy enough by its tempests and wrecks ! Such a general view is awful and horrid enough,—and we need not dwell, here, on the detail of the horrors of war, though that is undoubtedly the way to bring its

frightful aspect the closest to our apprehension. Imagine the spectacle of a violent death inflicted on *one* human being, with the instruments of war ; multiply this, to the extent of a great battle—with all the diversity of modes in which the living body may suffer, may be smitten, lacerated, mutilated, and destroyed ; and what there is in the minds of the mutual inflictors and sufferers ;—and all the consequences to survivors—to relatives—and to the condition of the inhabitants.

But now reflect a moment ! What a state of the spirit of mankind, of their heart and intellect is here disclosed before us !

Again ; what a state of their social constitution, and of their national situation, that the mass and strength of nations should, over the greatest part of the world, be at the absolute disposal of a few individuals, for this very business of war. And also ; what a state of the moral sense, or whatever we may name it, that there should be whole hosts of men, leaders and followers, capable of holding themselves totally divested of all personal responsibility for right and wrong, in the zealous prosecution of such achievements. And once more ; what a state of Christianity, as to any real, vital prevalence of it, among the nations denominated Christian. Our text must indeed be a prophecy yet unfulfilled. And so much the better for us, that it is not one of those of which the accomplishment is gone by. In looking toward the time when it will be accomplished we have, it is too true, a formidable prospect before us ; the fair vision beams from a distance, through a

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fearful intervening gloom. Looking at what men are as yet, compared with what they are to be in that better age, we may presage what is to come between ! There will, meanwhile, be the prayers of all good men in the world ; and the zealous endeavours of many of them to enlighten and improve mankind. And particularly it should be inculcated on religious and intellectual persons, on tutors and parents, that they set themselves, systematically, as opportunities offer, to counterwork that maddening enchantment of the "*glory*" of war ; of war considered just merely as the field of great exploit. Let them strive to break up, in the view of young and ardent minds, this splendid pestilent delusion about heroes, conquests, fame, and glory.

We said, "war simply regarded as an affair of heroism and great exploit,"—war taken independently of the *cause*—the *object*—the *reason*—the *justice* ; excepting, therefore, the heroic spirit as displayed in some very rare cases of war ; that is to say, where it has been displayed on the pure ground, and in the pure love, of justice, as in defence of liberty,—in vindication of the weak and injured,—in depressing the proud, ambitious, and cruel,—in resisting the oppressions of powerful wickedness ; such examples (if we should mention names) as those of Judas Maccabeus,—Alfred,—Wallace,—Kosciusko,—Washington.

This will seem assuming the possibility of cases in which war would be just, and not violate Christian principles. In passing, may we be allowed to advert, a moment, to that topic ?

We would observe,—it is most readily allowed that any principles upon which a Christian casuist would justify war, under certain possible circumstances, would not justify perhaps one in twenty of the wars that have been waged. Very rare has been the instance of a war, on either side, strictly and purely defensive, of either the nation itself, or any other endangered or oppressed people, depending on its protection. But suppose any case that should answer to the strictness of this condition,—what then ?

It is within the easy recollection of many of us, that about four or five years since our government in India had a war with a nation (if we may name it so) called *Pindarees*. In fact, they were a terrible assemblage of outlaws, robbers, and murderers, to the number of fifty thousand, occupying a strong and almost inaccessible tract on the northern frontier. Thence, with impetuous rapidity, they rushed down, all horsemen, on the country, inhabited by a population of cultivators ; seized whatever could easily be carried off—and with furious eagerness demolished, burnt, destroyed, the rest. But far more than this, they were universally possessed with the spirit of murder ; they killed the people, without regard to sex or age ; not only so, but, when sufficiently at leisure for such amusement, they inflicted excruciating tortures previous to death.

Now, when the Governor-General had intelligence of this—*what was he to do? what*, acting as a Christian? *Nothing?* What, as a great magistrate, did he “*bear the sword*” for ? What was he Governor at all for ? to

live in splendid state, and number and tax the people? Or was he to direct that prayers should be made in the churches for something very like a miracle? And on failure of that, prayers that the wretched people he governed might be all meekly resigned to their fate? and that even, should the fell and fiendish legion, being unresisted, choose to pursue their way all down to Calcutta, all the people in their track, that could not escape, and at last himself and the people of the city—might be enabled calmly to submit to a sovereign dispensation of Providence?

He did not do this. He chose rather to act on the rule of his appointment, to be "*a terror to evil doers,*" "*a minister of God, a revenger, to execute wrath upon them that do evil,*" (Rom. xiii. 4.) But if war is in all possible cases wrong, he perpetrated an enormous crime against Christianity, in marching his armies with a celerity unparalleled in that climate, and encountering, intercepting, and exterminating the murderers, so that the surviving people could feel themselves in peace.

Make a supposition respecting this our own land, which is now literally *the last asylum of political, civil, and religious liberty in Europe*. For its being so, there is not one person here, who doubts that it is mortally hated by the grand league of despots who are earnestly intent on destroying these things from the earth;—or who doubts, that if it were an accessible place, a convenient part of the continent, we should before this day next year, receive some significations of the wish and the will of this league, that we should lay down these privileges; and on our

refusal, half a million of armed ruffians would soon be in motion ?

God be thanked for our insular situation ! But, suppose that notwithstanding this, ~~that~~ dreadful league, become more consolidated in power and resources, were, in their elation, to adopt the determination to try. They send, suppose, an embassy to express their will. As men having human rights, we think proper to refuse. But what then ? for, as Christians, we judge it wrong and wicked to fight. Let this latter be known and believed sincere, and the dictators may take the matter very much at their ease ; a very moderate martial equipment may suffice. It is really therefore needless to put the stronger case, of an immense host of northern barbarians being landed on our coasts (Tartars—Cossacks—Calmucks), and joined there by the legions of the popish states. Unless indeed we should suppose a divided opinion in the nation, with respect to the Christian principle of the case ; and that so, a very large and powerful proportion were resolute to resist, in all the array and action of war. Now, while, with the utmost sacrifice and peril, they were doing so, and suppose successfully,—what a remarkable phenomenon would be presented ! namely, the other division of the people, deploring these very proceedings and successes, by which their houses are saved from ravage and desolation,—deploring them as an awful outrage against Christian rectitude,—praying for an instant *conversion* of these deluded men to a right apprehension of Christian duty—that they might immediately throw away their arms, and allow the barbarian inundation to burst

forward ;—or, having failed in this prayer (and a mighty victory having finally cleared the land of the infernal irruption), then lamenting that a dreadful national violation of Christian principles had been irretrievably consummated ! And, as success purchased by crime can, in the result, be little else than a calamity and a judgment, they might be alarmed and dismayed to find themselves still in possession of their former freedom of worship, of speech, and of action, and of all their rights as citizens.

The principle in question rests on the literal and extreme construction of a few expressions (such as “ *Resist not evil.* ” “ *Give place to wrath.* ” “ *Love your enemies.* ” “ *To him that smiteth thee on one cheek, turn also the other.* ”) Expressions which have an easy and applicable meaning in the general sense of interdicting revenge, retaliation, proud, prompt, and angry re-action ; while their unqualified literal interpretation (and that taken without any reference to the specific vocation of apostles and missionaries) plainly tends to this effect, namely, that Christianity should subject mankind universally to the unrestrained will of whoever is the most unjust and wicked ; that so long as there are men who have more of Satan and Moloch in them than the rest, and are intent on practising oppression and cruelty, it is the absolute duty of Christians, as such, individually and nationally, to let them do it ;—at least rather than resist them in such a way as to endanger their persons. Now this would be a most delightful doctrine to all the tyrants, bigots, *slave-drivers*, robbers and murderers !

And so, while we are imagining that God approves good order and justice in human society, and requires that institutions be appointed to maintain and dispense justice, and regulation, and protection,—all this while his last, best religion is, in effect, the patron of bold and remorseless iniquity. The case would be so, as long as the worst men are bold, ambitious, and insatiable ; it *must*, unless we should expect the world's affairs to be administered by a perpetual miraculous interference ; that is to say, administered on a principle the direct opposite to that which we see to be actually the divine plan for human affairs, that is, a system of human means and agency. According to this system is the divine appointment and sanction of magistracy and national government. The magistrate is not *so* to leave the matter to God's disposal as to refrain from using the "*sword*" against the doers of evil. And the government of a nation is but a magistracy on a larger scale.

We should apologize for having dwelt so much longer than was intended on this topic, instead of that most delightful one to which the prophecy points—*the cessation of war*. But in truth, whatever room we had, it were difficult to expatiate in particulars on that noble anticipation. There is a difference in this case (of war) between history and prophecy. This history of the world's warfare, is broad, palpable, with prominent lines and features, spread out in a vast array of actual events ; the prophecy is one bright, general, idea without particulars. The only mode of illustrating and expanding it, is to conceive a full reversal of the character of the history. And

that will spread a visionary scene before us, so new, and strange, and delightful, that nothing but prophecy, and faith in the divine power and goodness, could enable us to expect its realization. Think of a condition of the world, (and that world far more populous than now,) when there will be no tyrants,—no rapacious ambition,—no hostile rivalry,—no notion possessing the governors and chief men of the nations, that the people were made merely to subserve *their* passions and projects ; no crafty, fallacious, hypocritical, representation to the people, to stimulate jealousy and hatred against other nations, in order to make them the willing instruments of violence ; no restless vigilance and alarm respecting the designs of neighbouring states ; no intelligence of suspicious appearances of preparation and armament ; no negotiations of alliances, for either aggression or defence. Think of a condition of the world, when there will be no exhausting alienations from the rewards of peaceful industry, to maintain a mighty apparatus for destruction of both industry and man ; no scenes, where, in one day, on one small spot, more pain is inflicted than the sum of that which is suffered, perhaps, by the people of all Europe, in the ordinary course of things ; when ten, or twenty, or forty thousand men are alive and well in the morning, and dead at night,—gashed and bloody, and ready to be tossed indiscriminately into pits ; no storming, sacking, burning of towns, or shattering and sinking of fleets ; no aged parents, or wives and children, mourning the destroyed relatives, or sinking that mourning in terror for themselves ; no devasta-

tion of all that peaceful toil has planted and built on the plains ; no consumption of labour, art, science, and genius, in creating or applying the machinery of war. Think of the vast proportion of these (art, science, and genius,) hitherto so occupied, and of what will be the effect of so much applied to all peaceful and beneficial purposes, in addition to all besides that will be so employed. Think, again, of all the quantity (if we may express it so,) of passion, of feeling, of strong emotion, that has gone towards, and gone into, war, directed to the promotion of public and private good. The stream of sentiment,—of strong interest,—of ardent feeling, in other words, the passion, the affection, which, during the last half century, has flowed into *that river of blood* !—think, if it had, instead, flowed through all the channels and streams of peaceful benevolence ! Will there, in the better age, be less sentiment and passion so to flow ?

And then, over all, through all, and as the cause of all,—the vital religion of Jesus Christ ;—his kingdom shall be, “*from shore to shore, and from the river to the ends of the earth.*” And be it always remembered, that it is in the progressive prevalence of his religion, as the supreme cause, that alone we can look for the advancement toward the state of universal and inviolable peace. It will, in going on, assume into its service and co-operation, increasing knowledge, and all improvements in political science and institutions ; but it is, *itself alone*, the security that these shall be fully efficient for good. The enlarged promotion of *this*, therefore, we have to desire and

implore above all things. And while we see its advancement but slow as yet, and behold the world under a sky menacing storms and thunders,—let our faith maintain a firm assurance that the Almighty will, at length, fulfil all his promises in universal Christianity and universal Peace.

November 5, 1823.

LECTURE XIII.

PART II.

THE CESSATION OF WAR AN EFFECT OF THE PREVALENCE
OF CHRISTIANITY.

ISAIAH ii. 4.

“ They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks ; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

WE had no intention, last time, of resuming this text and subject. But that discourse having been occupied wholly with images of *War*, it has been remarked, that to close *there* the considerations arising from such a text, appeared like a determination to dwell on nothing but the most gloomy side of a subject. We may, therefore, be excused in returning to it, for the purpose of directing the attention toward a more pleasing prospect.

But it is obvious, in such a case, what an advantage history has over prophecy. The history is an immense but crowded exhibition of solid and prominent facts ; while the prophecy is only one general, bright idea, not distinguished into particulars, not

shaped into features. The state of war is spread out to our view, the width of the world, and the length of all time, filled with certain and unchangeable realities. We can, just as much, in looking over a tract of country, avoid perceiving the hills, woods, towers, and villages, as, in surveying the world's wide history, we can fail to see the portentous forms of destruction. We behold mighty desolating irruptions, battles, sieges, massacres, murders, and bloody persecutions on account of religion. And if some tracts of history have been overspread with an obscurity, till more recent, laborious researches have rendered them visible,—as the mist clears off, you are certain of what you shall see there first and foremost.

We do not here forget, how much there has been that was *not* hostility ; nor, that there is a prominence—a magnitude and glare, in martial transactions, by which they have obtained a disproportionate space in history ; while peaceful periods and scenes, with their agriculture, arts, commerce, civilization, and domestic quiet, and kind affections, are contracted, in the historical view, to a diminutive compass, or wholly sunk out of sight. No :—but consider, that mankind *could* not be always fighting ; the utmost disposition for it, must, some time, yield to suspend the operation. Consider, how easily, by what slight causes, notwithstanding and amidst all those better things, men could be roused and fired for war ; that those very seasons of peace, with their improvements and growing wealth, have generally been regarded, expressly, as but a repose and

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reparation of strength for new war ; and that the favourite literature and amusements of such times have had very much a relation to war. And consider, too, what a collectiveness and concentration there is in war, of all human forces and means ; so that a given measure (so to speak) of war is tantamount to a vastly greater *apparent* measure of peaceful life and action. All proportion is distanced and lost ; set its quantity of ardent exertion and of danger in proportion against, what quantity of action and hazard in peaceful life ? or its expenditure of wealth, —its number of deaths. So that war, as a part of the state of mankind, is equal to a prodigiously greater nominal proportion of the peaceful state. Therefore, though history *has* given an undue distinction and proportion to war, yet, it would be no rightly proportioned history that did not give a great prominence to this portion of what has been done by men. It is right, therefore, that a very large portion of the great field of history should be seen overspread with this direful appearance.

Such is the History. The delightful Prophecy presents a scene of which no part is so occupied. But it is difficult to realize the fact to our imagination. No fighting on the face of the whole earth ! no armies, nor military profession, nor garrisons, nor arms, nor banners, nor proclamations ! No leagues, offensive or defensive ; — no guarding of frontiers ; — no fortresses ; — no military prisons ! No celebrating of victories, in gaudy pomps and revelries for the vulgar, or in prostituted poetry for the more refined ! A wondering what kind of times those could be, in

which mankind accounted it the highest glory to kill one another ! Truly this is a state of things we are ill prepared even to conceive.

And again ; is it not difficult to conceive the practicability of its attainment ? For it is something intrinsic in man, in the soul and nature of man, throughout the whole race, that war has sprung from. *There*, is the brimstone,—the gunpowder,—the forge ; there is the hot and terrible element, that has burst abroad in so many thunders,—that has attracted infernal spirits to combine in its fires. And yet it is *man* that is to be universally at peace ! How can it be ? We feel somewhat like the unbelieving lord,—“ *if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be.*” Take mankind collectively, such as it has been in any age, or is now ; with all the dispositions, existing as they were, and are. Now, with all these dispositions in full prevalence, conceive, notwithstanding, the whole world kept actually in perfect peace for a century, in nations and every minor community. Would not this be the most astonishing of all miracles ? Would not this be a direct, immediate coercion of almighty Power, permanently suspending or reversing a grand law of moral nature ? But a time is to come, when, without any such miraculous coercion, *man* will be in universal peace ! For no one can suppose that this universal peace will be effected and maintained by such direct coercion. But then, think what there must not be in men, when there shall “ *no more*” be war amongst them ! Vicious selfishness, ambition, envy, rivalry, rapacity, revenge,—these are the things

in men that cause wars between them, on the small scale and on the great. And how can these ever be so repressed, subdued, extirpated, that all war shall cease?

Men indifferent or hostile to religion have been of different opinions on the subject. There may indeed have been some wicked theorizers, who have even asserted that religion itself must be extirpated before war can be; alleging how very often something which they choose to call religion, has been itself the cause of wars, and has exasperated their cruelty,—meaning that execrable compound of superstition and state policy which really has been such a cause. This they have chosen to name religion; either, if that be possible, in stupid ignorance, knowing no better; or, in spite of their own better knowledge, and presuming on the ignorance of others. Some irreligious speculators, indeed, have avowed a disbelief that war will or can from any cause ever cease in the world; alleging all experience and the radical dispositions of man, which dispositions they ridicule the notion and hope that anything can ever effectually alter. But there have been other irreligious speculators (self-called philosophers), very sanguine in their predictions of the abolition of war, ultimately. “It cannot be (they have said) that mankind will always continue so mad as to seek and expect their pleasure, advantage, and glory, in destroying and being destroyed. Progressive experience and knowledge will at length avail, both to mitigate the bad passions, and to establish in general conviction better and wiser *principles of self-interest*. A more free and extensive intercourse will contribute to conciliate

the nations,—will eradicate their inveterate prejudices and animosities,—and introduce a more liberal policy. They will become, on all sides, *wiser calculators*, and consider what it costs to settle their differences by means of war. Increase of literature and enlightened speculation, in the higher classes, will make them feel the coarseness and barbarism of the passion for war. Progressive civilization in the inferior classes, will attach them to those advantages, and enjoyments of comfort, commodiousness, and competence, on which war makes such ravages. And at length, too few men for the business of war will be found willing to abandon these satisfactions to go into such an employment.” And all this, observe, *independently of religion*.

Now we would give their due to all things of such an order. Such things will be *included*, certainly, in whatever process can and shall reduce the world at length to peace ; they will be taken as accessories and subsidiaries to the Master Power in the operation. But whoever would reckon on such things alone, should be strangely mortified, one thinks, in adverting to many facts of old and recent history. What, for example, is he to do with the History of Greece ? or of the Italian Republics ? Or nearer home ; Britain and France account themselves the most enlightened, improved, civilized states in the world. And have they not been, with all their might, fighting and slaying each other and neighbouring nations, for centuries almost without intermission, down to this time ? In the French revolutionary government, which, after a time, became essentially warlike, there

were more philosophers, speculative, literary men, than ever in any other. In our own country, through the last half century, the enlightened and civilized people (often so described and lauded at least) have needed but a little excitement, at any time, to rush out into war. Our institutions of learning and even theology have constantly abetted the spirit. And an ever-flowing impetuous stream there has been, of oratory, poetry, and even pulpit-declamation, mingling with, and inspiring, the coarser torrent of the popular zeal for battles and victories. We have had both poets and divines actually sending the most immoral heroes to heaven, on the mere strength of their falling in patriotic combat. All this tells but ill for the efficacy of civilization, literature, refinement, and the instruction of experience to promote the spirit of peace ; without the predominance of some mightier cause. And how obvious it is, that all these, regarded as principal causes, must be inefficacious. For all causes must be so, that do not include, as the chief principle, the fear of God. In the very nature of things, it cannot be, that any race of intelligent creatures within the Divine dominion can be ordered right, without regard to Him as the governor. Without this, there can be no peremptory authority to enforce the rules of righteousness, of equity, on men's minds. Without this, the maxims of a corrupt policy, the fashion of the age, the seduction of brilliant example, will be sure to have the sway. Men will never generally be just to one another, but under the sense of the presence of the God of Justice.

Again ; nothing will operate efficaciously to this grand effect that does not go deep into the constitution of men's souls, and change their temper ; so as to quell internally those fatal passions, which have perpetuated external war. And that is what cannot be done by any civilization, national refinement, science, or even, an enlightened theoretical policy. All these may be but like fair structures and gardens, extended over a ground where volcanic fires are in a temporary slumber below. All these may be shattered and exploded by some mighty impulse of ambition, or some blast of revengeful anger. These exterior improvements may leave those passions in full existence there ;—and if they be existing, they will prove it is not for nothing. No polish, cultivation, or intelligence in a nation, would be any security against its being possessed by a spirit of *haughty and imperious pride*, which would impel it to resent and revenge some insult, at whatever cost of blood and destruction ;—or any security against *ambition* when tempted by some opportune juncture for making a splendid conquest ;—or against a nation's running mad for martial glory, at the will and under the direction of some great national champion ;—or against the pernicious delusion of an extravagant patriotism. No ; there must be a greater, nobler power brought into prevalence among mankind, and that is, plainly, CHRISTIANITY. It is in no other way, assuredly, that prophecy gives the pledge for the realization of our hope on this subject. And on any other ground, we should agree with those speculators who scorn the notion of mankind being ever

estranged from war. Nothing springing merely from the action of the human mind can suffice. It must be something coming from heaven. And *this* is the appointed and qualified agent.

The bright day, however, of its general efficacy, is yonder in futurity ; perhaps far off. Yet it has accomplished something in this direction already. We dare not assert, even, that it may not have prevented some wars. And its advocates have often observed, that to *it* is mainly attributable the mitigation of ferocity and exterminating rage, so evident in modern wars in these countries. And look at its genuine tendency, as displayed on the smaller scale, in a family,—a neighbourhood,—a district. Who has not heard some instance of a family, in a wretched constant state of hostility within itself ; but at length one, and then another, of the members of it, have been converted by the religion of Jesus Christ. The consequence how happy ! But partly within our knowledge and our memory, there have been whole districts of our country wonderfully altered by this same agent ; especially in Lancashire and Cornwall. And it is pleasing to observe,—where a considerable number are thus happily changed, there is a great external and preventive effect wrought on the general body of the community, in such a place ; so that all the direct efficacy of religion has also an indirect one.

Now, imagine this double effect of religion extended throughout a nation ; say, a powerful one, like this. And what will the natural consequence be in respect to war ? Will it not be,—a com-

parative coldness toward that pernicious phantasm of martial "*glory*;"—a loathing of that sort of eloquence and poetry that are making a god of it;—a hatred of the very name of ambitious conquerors;—horror at the image of vast masses of men meeting to destroy one another;—reflection, how unprepared most of them are to go into eternity;—compassion, by anticipation, toward deprived and mourning relatives;—a sense of the flagrant absurdity, as well as iniquity, of avenging some little wrong at the cost of so mighty a portion and variety of misery;—a revolting, on an economical account, at the idea of such a waste and destruction of the means of the community;—and a faith that Providence has not so abandoned the world that we are not to wait one moment, for any interposition from it in favour of justice, but, the instant the scales of justice are poised, we must throw in the sword. Such would be the spirit and temper of a nation predominantly Christian.

But, it may be said;—such a nation might nevertheless have a government fierce for war, and that would force the nation into it. We hardly believe that such a nation would have such a government; for as wicked governments are given as the scourge and just plague of irreligious and wicked nations; we think the Supreme Righteous Governor would not let such an evil be on such a people. But supposing its government were of such a temper, it surely would not, unless lost to all prudence, (and then it would soon destroy itself,) it would not rush into war, under the decided general disapprobation of such a people.

Now, we have only to imagine the same progress of pure, vital Christianity in several nations, and then *they* are most certainly at peace. And supposing several great nations brought to 'this state, think what a mighty and preponderating influence they, combined, would have over the other nations, in which Christianity had as yet gained far less ground. *They* might form an alliance most truly "*holy*" for the exertion of such influence. We may be very sure that their interposed mediation to prevent wars among the other nations would be of prodigious weight ; by (for one thing) their lofty character, and unquestionably upright intentions ; or next, if that influence failed, by the awe of the power, of another kind, which such unexhausted nations would possess. For we are supposing them to keep in armories and arsenals for some time those implements which are, ultimately, to take the shape of ploughshares and pruning-hooks.

We may extend our imagination of this grand process over the whole earth. And (as we said in the former discourse), if we believe in the future extension of the knowledge and vital power of the religion of Christ over it all,—we necessarily conceive this progressive abolition of war. Every extension then of this blessed religion is so much gained against war ; quenching still another and another spark of an infernal fire ;—repressing in some more minds those evil passions which are the prompters and the essential power of war. It is a most auspicious sign, therefore, that in this very age of hostile commotion, there is arising a new and most

extraordinary activity for promoting Christianity. And we think this zeal bears a marked characteristic of being of divine origination, in the circumstance of its being animated with so much energy and confident hope, in spite of such a world of gloomy facts and omens. Because it holds by the strength of divine declarations, it dares to be confident against an infinity of what is adverse ; herein differing from the mere ordinary spirit of mere human projects. Is not this a presage something like that accompanying the birth of Samson ? This newly risen zeal for Christianity is the infant Samson, growing up against a world of the Philistines of war, and not, like him, to perish itself in its victories.

We may sometimes indulge our imagination on the future scene of *universal peace*. The grand reversal of what the earth has been hitherto. No more the spectacle—of tracts devastated with fire and sword,—of besieged towns dilapidated and burning over the famished and dying inhabitants,—or stormed, and their streets running with blood ;—or, of a vast assemblage of men arrayed and confronted in two hosts ; in the morning in health and vigour, in the evening twenty or thirty thousand of them dead and dying in every frightful form of laceration and mutilation, in all modes and degrees of anguish,—besides all that is in their souls during the day and at the end,—and great ditches and pits for them to be thrown into in the mass. No more, the wealth or perhaps the poverty of a nation, and the ingenuity and labours of myriads of the people, put in requisition in preparing the apparatus for

destruction. All that will remain of war will be its monumental relics and its records,—the subjects of how many musings,—partly mournful, but soon turning to delightful felicitation, and gratitude to the Almighty.

But we are not to regard the scene in a merely negative view, that there will not be war; for when there is not war, what will there be? what? when the numbers of mankind are greater, and far more cultivated and intelligent, when the resources are more abundant, when the time, and faculties, and labours are no longer so perverted? Think, a moment of but this last part of the account. Think what would be effected by so much wealth, time, labour, art, ingenuity, directed to the noblest purposes of peace. Contemplate especially the happiest view of the subject. That there will be no war, will be because the religion of Christ will prevail in the souls, life, and activities of men,—in the individuals and communities, small and great. And prevailing Christianity, what will that cause men to do, in this universal vacation from war? Besides their ordinary necessary labours (the work of the "*ploughshare*" and all the implements of peaceful industry), think of the religious employments, the intellectual pursuits, the exercises of charity, which there will be in such a race, in such a time!

But we can surmise that here some aspiring ardent spirit might say, doubtingly—"Would there in such a state of mankind be excitement enough for a strong and lofty spirit? any scope and occasion for noble enterprise?" Think of the perversion of human

sentiment! that exploits of war should have come to be deemed necessary in order that strong and ardent minds may have an adequate employment! But we have to answer, that there will at all events remain, then, one illustrious line of enterprise. "And what can that be?" Answer, no less than the enterprise of "*taking by violence the kingdom of heaven.*" Will not that be something worthy of the most ardent spirit, something equal to the highest aspiring of ambition? But perhaps our high-minded questioner pauses at this, and feels something of a damp and a disappointment. And, perhaps, if he spoke, would say—"that does not suit the temper of my ambition." Perhaps not, indeed;—but we have to tell him, that it will suit the ambition of the men of that future period, for, then, the religion of Christ will actuate their passions.

But subordinately to this, as the grand object of zealous ambition, it were easy, if we had time, to represent on that pacific field, many modes of exertion quite adequate to the highest tone of enterprise; always keeping in mind that the very taste and inclination for destructive enterprise will be annihilated.

Will it be impertinent just to name a kind of objection, of a sceptical cast, from the quarter of our Economists, that under such a system, the inhabitants of the world would be too numerous, after a course of ages for it to support? There is a most violent and wilful excess in their mode of calculation. But, with this exception, we mention this opinion to admit it. But the matter of exceeding wonder is, that none of

these speculators (the able leader of them being himself of the sacred profession) should ever seem to recollect that revelation has spoken of such a thing as *the end of the world!* Nothing can be more easy to conceive, than that the period of that end of all things may be appointed to coincide with the term when the population has reached the utmost limit of the earth's capacity to sustain it.

Lastly, as an admonition to individuals professing Christianity—let them consider, whether they are now of a disposition congenial to such a state of peace, that is, is there in them an effectual repression of that which is the spirit of war? the selfishness,—pride,—arrogance,—envy,—revenge? If not, they are essentially of the *war tribe*, however little they have to do with actual war;—however much they may condemn and profess to deplore it. It is just from a prevalence of such principles in communities that they go to mortal war. And such individuals are not fit for that future terrestrial "*kingdom of heaven.*"

November 20, 1823.

LECTURE XIV.

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF DANIEL.

DANIEL vi. 28.

“ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

It is probable that few parts of the sacred history and biography have been read with a more pleasing interest than the account of Daniel. It might not then be unacceptable to make a brief survey of what is recorded of him, with such reflections as may arise from the facts.

He was one of the young men of the higher rank (himself generally believed to be of the royal kindred) who were carried to Babylon in the great captivity ; and there, with three others of them he was selected, on account of conspicuous personal and mental qualifications, to be, after due training, introduced into the service of the Court ; a very hazardous thing for young men ; but here, for once, the pestilent influence struck on incorruptible materials. On hearing of any young man (of talents especially) advancing in the world—rising to distinction and station, the first point one would be glad to be assured of is, that he has a conscience, a true and faithful one. For we know full well, that, if he

have not, every step of his advancement will be but a curse to him. Here, in the instance of Daniel, we have the right man. The first movement for his promotion found his conscience, and found it of a firm and sound consistence. The question was, of his living on the appointed portion of the king's provisions. This might seem no such very considerable matter, to be made an insurmountable obstacle at the very entrance of a prosperous career. With an ordinary man, how many persuasive pleas and extenuations would have come in to help him over it! But conscience cannot well begin the exercise of its jurisdiction at matters too small. When comparatively small matters of conscience can easily be disposed of, in favour of inclination and worldly interest, it is a very unpromising sign for the conduct in greater ones. It is true that sometimes (indeed very commonly among the superstitious) men have made much of little things, in order to obtain a kind of licence to make little of great ones. It was notoriously so among the Jews in our Lord's time. But Daniel was not one of those, who while "*straining at a gnat*" can "*swallow a camel*." He carried his conscience throughout,—as the one thing he was not to forfeit, whatever else he should forego, or incur.

It is happy when such a man has friends that are like him. Daniel had three that were worthy of him ; though it may be, that the influence of his high and ascendent character contributed very much to make them so. He found that he should be faithfully seconded in his fidelity to God ; that there were men prepared to go all lengths and hazards with him ; to

cast in their lot with him, for better and for worse ; for life and for death. And see how the principle of their friendship, their generous compact, was illustrated (at a period further on in the history), namely, they were all such as would combine their prayers to the Almighty for his benediction on their associated state and conduct. And let youthful friends be admonished to make that a grand point in their preferences for companionship.

They refused the royal indulgence, though the grant and appointment of it involved something of the nature of a command ; and limited themselves to the humble fare of the most austere and self-mortifying hermit ; and that too through the whole space of three years, that is, the anticipated space ; for the term was in fact shortened by events. Yet they flourished the more, and did not incur the evil which the friendly officer, who had the charge of them, apprehended. No man shall, ultimately at least, be a loser by any sacrifice and self-denial conscientiously rendered to God. He will graciously receive the tribute, and he can compensate the sacrifice, in any one, or in several, of an unknown variety of ways. To these admirable young men it was done in these two ways at once ;—they were in personal condition no worse, but the contrary, for what any young men of such quality might have regarded as rigorous penance,—and the resentment to be feared from their monarch and conqueror was entirely prevented. And a much worse thing was precluded, that is, the subsequent condemnation or insensibility of their own consciences.

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Daniel, increasing in wisdom and virtue, we see in high favour with the conqueror’s officer of state; and soon to appear in a very high and solemn capacity before that imperial personage himself. The king had had in his dreams what he retained an impression of as a portentous vision, but could not recall it. The summons was issued to the *“wise men”* of Babylon, with the dreadful menace, *“if ye will not make known unto me the dream and the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill,”* (ii. 5.) This may seem like the unreasonable and extravagant demand of a tyrant; but in effect, perhaps, it was not so grossly unjust. Those that would set up themselves as having an intelligence far beyond the sphere of mere human knowledge, had perhaps little right to make, at their will, selections and exceptions as to the cases to which their super-human knowledge should be required to be competent. They tell the king indeed that none but *“the gods”* are competent to the case; but, unless they were in intimate communication with *“the gods,”* what business had they to make such pretensions as they did, which were no less than to give infallible predictions of *future* events? *Thus much* (which they pretended to) they must have obtained from *“the gods,”* for it would be idle and impious to assume to have such illumination from any other quarter. And it was but a *less* thing, that a *past* circumstance should be revealed to them by these divinities. But no god intervened in this

extremity. The wise men pleaded and even remonstrated in vain ; they were reduced to silence and confusion. The king might justly have told them that they ought to have been honest enough *before* such a trial to acknowledge and make known such a capricious limitation of their super-natural faculty.

In his disappointment and anger he sent forth a decree for the destruction of "*all the wise men of Babylon.*" And it seems this qualification of "*wise*" was become a known character of Daniel and his three friends ; and therefore they were obnoxious to the decree. But they had a resource which the other wise men had not ; they had access to Omniscience itself. And Daniel, brought before the king, requested and obtained time to converse with a Being that the king and his "*wise men*" did not know ; avowing his perfect confidence that a heavenly light would fall upon his spirit. We may observe, that in those great emergencies where such a direction is required as is evidently beyond the competence of human judgment, a good man should trust to the *immediate* signification or interposition of the Divine Spirit. Cases strictly answering to this description are not perhaps of frequent occurrence. Yet there have been not a few such situations in the infinitely various experience of the servants of God, especially in troubled and perilous times ;—conjunctures of circumstances in which it was purely impossible to determine by human judgment ; *then* might be implored a *direct* intimation from the Supreme Wisdom ; and unquestionably it has been

granted. To Daniel it was granted in the most illustrious form of inspiration. Here was a signal occasion for God to make manifest the difference between the wisdom and powers imparted to his prophets, and all the pretended super-natural endowments that deluded a superstitious people. And there were many remarkable occasions on which this vindicating and triumphant contrast was exhibited ; so that God "*left not himself without witness,*" and the heathens and their deceivers were "*left without excuse.*"

Daniel appears with serene dignity before the monarch ; with the lost vision painted luminously by the Divine Spirit on his imagination ; and with an intelligence as luminously expanding forward into futurity ; and very probably with somewhat of supernatural expression on his countenance. Is there not something delightful in seeing and thinking, to what an elevation it has been shown possible for mortals to be raised through communication with the greatest Being ? How much sublimer here appears the prophet than the mighty monarch ! indeed, in the monarch's own estimation ; for, after the dream and the interpretation were declared, "*the king fell down on his face and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours to him,*" (ii. 46.) The better thing was, that he testified an awful veneration of the God that could impart such inspirations. Immediately after this, he raised Daniel to the highest station in the administration of the government, and promoted his three friends to high offices.

But, after a while, this prophet and devout statesman was to witness how transient may be the impression of the most striking and even convincing manifestations from heaven. For, there comes next the account of the golden idol "*set up in the plain of Dura.*" This *would* seem passing strange. To have been brought as into the presence and glory of the God of Daniel,—to have had acknowledged evidence of his superiority over all that was previously known of Divinity,—and then to make a lifeless image of metal to be adored! Perhaps every reader is struck with it as a fact approaching to monstrous. But, in truth, this is but a more palpable and aggravated specimen of an absurdity, still very common among men, in more enlightened times and regions. They believe,—they acknowledge the God of heaven, and ascribe to him all that is glorious;—and then,—they set up their idols, each one for himself to worship; not indeed, avowedly as gods, to receive, expressly, divine honours, but virtually adored;—to be the objects of chief interest,—deepest, warmest attachment,—dependence for happiness,—to be earnestly laboured for,—lived for,—even died for, in a melancholy and thankless martyrdom. Happy, if these idolaters could be as soon and effectually convinced of the vanity of what they adore, as Nebuchadnezzar was with respect to his golden image!

We shall not expatiate on the scene of Dura, every way magnificent and memorable, and, of itself, affording a subject ample enough for prolonged contemplation. Daniel, in some way not explained, appears to have stood exempt from the trial that awaited

his three noble friends. He would feel profoundly interested in their conduct on so grand an occasion. But his anticipations of them, and for them, would be confident, and even elevated and felicitous. We can imagine his intercourse with them, relative to the subject, previously to the appointed day and hour. And the converse of such men, in such a predicament, may be believed to have surpassed all that poets have feigned, in pathos, in solemnity, in adjuration to fidelity to God, in affectionate vows, in heroic piety. He would see them to their position between the idol and the fiery furnace. He might then retire to present them before his God and theirs; from which employment he was, ere long, to be called, to meet them again with the most delightful congratulations that ever sprung from the sublimest emotions.

The next part of the history is given by Nebuchadnezzar himself, (ch. iv.) in a long proclamation to the people of his dominions. He describes a mysterious dream, (that of the great tree,) which had filled him with apprehension. He honestly relates that he had (very strange as such a proceeding was) once more sent for the vain pretenders to hidden wisdom, whose tribe had escaped destruction through the favour of God towards Daniel and his friends, (as often the wicked in this world are spared on account of the righteous.) And once more Daniel was proved to be the only oracle of the Divine Intelligence. The interpretation was followed, a year after, by the accomplishment.

Nebuchadnezzar, on recovering his reason, certainly made an excellent use of it, in this very noble

proclamation ; in which he explicitly records his own self-idolizing pride, and the ignominious condition to which he was justly abased, on account of it, by a divine judgment. And he closes with the most elevated sentiments in honour of the divine majesty and justice, with an unaffected dignity and energy of expression. A striking contrast to all the hypocritical cant and pompous formality. Nothing like it, or comparable to it, was ever sent forth by any monarch.

We are left to conclude that, soon after this, he retired from his palace to his tomb. Daniel would lament his death ; for with the great capacity for good, there did, at last, seem combined the right disposition toward it. No potentate ever had such a mourner. His grandson Belshazzar followed him in the empire ; and was destined to perish in its fall. His life, except its very last scene, appeared not worth recording ; for one chief reason, because the great friend and minister of his predecessor had little to do with the course of it. The closing spectacle may speak for the whole character of his reign ;—feasting and revelry—libertine profligacy—vain pomp—insolent contempt of anything connected with the name of the true God—and an utter estrangement from the best and wisest of his subjects.

We can easily imagine what was likely to be the condition, as to morals and everything else, of an empire under such a head. And what an exemplification it was of what was spoken by the voice in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, that the Most High sometimes "*setteth over the kingdom the basest of men !*"

The luxurious banqueting was *timed* very characteristically of the chief reveller and his court ; for at that time the empire was formidably invaded, and the city was actually besieged by Cyrus, after he had, as history mentions, utterly defeated Belshazzar in battle. “ *They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone,*” (v. 4.) But festivity and idolatry were not enough, in this most perilous juncture of the kingdom, without some special insult to the God of Israel ; and the vessels of his temple at Jerusalem were ordered to be brought for these bacchanalian libations. It looks like judicial infatuation, when in circumstances of peculiar danger impending, a direct insult is offered to the Divine Majesty.

But now, imagine this jovial assemblage, of the royalty and nobility of Babylon. They had met expecting nothing but luxury and conviviality there. But something else, something besides, was to come ! But would they not be sufficiently fortified against whatever that might be ? No ; it proved otherwise ; for four words written by a shadowy hand on the wall, put all their mirth and spirit to flight. The words of the Almighty can be made to throw out, when he wills, an overpowering energy. This company could revel in exuberant gaiety, with the legions of a victorious besieging army around their city ; but *the four words !* that was an irresistible assault on the elation of their hilarity ! that threw as it were “ *the shadow of death* ” over their joyous and brilliant assembly !

An instant summons was issued to the astrologers

and soothsayers, and once more their intervention was in vain. We see in what profound obscurity Daniel must have been, in this reign ; for the king did not recollect any such person. The queen, his mother probably, came to inform him of such a man, and of the important capacity in which he had stood in relation to the former monarch. When, at her advice, Daniel was introduced, the king actually asked him, "*Art thou that Daniel whom the king my father brought out of Jewry?*" He had had his counsellors, and ministers, and favourites, and priests, and poets, and seers ; but his inquiries and notice had never fallen on such a man as Daniel !

For an interpretation of the portentous words, splendid rewards and appointments were offered, which a few hours hence were not to be his to give, and for which the prophet expressed the utmost indifference. The prophet made to him, first, a solemn representation of his careless and wicked life, and of his final act of profaneness against the God whom he ought to have known Almighty ; and then interpreted. There was no space for repentance ; for "*that night was the king of the Chaldeans slain,*" and the city taken. The manner of its being taken by Cyrus the Mede, who was to be king of Persia, is familiar to those who have read illustrations of the sacred history.

Daniel might now indulge his solemn meditations over the memories and the tombs of departed monarchs, whom he had beheld in all the plenitude of imperial splendour and pride. They were now but dust and a name ; left among the memorials of

an empire also departed. But *his* great Master still lived! unchangeable in glory and goodness; and he remained unchangeably devoted to him, all the same, whatever became of mortal potentates and empires. He wanted no patron; the smiles or frowns of monarchs were indifferent to him. He was in favour with the Highest Power, insomuch that he was addressed by an angelic messenger with the unequalled appellation, "*O man greatly beloved!*" To a man who had heard *that*, think how any title of worldly dignity, of mortal favour, would have sounded! We can conceive of him, more even than of many other of the prophets, that the general habitual state of his mind, was of an elevation, in thought and devotion, peculiarly adapted to receive the special illapses of inspiration,—that (if we might express it so) heavenly visits had not to descend so entirely to the earth to reach him. These communications from on high he probably enjoyed often. Several of his prophetic visions, foreshowing a distant futurity, are related in his book, occupying indeed the larger part of it; especially some sublime representations of the Messiah and his kingdom. These carry us away from the immediate view of the man; but there remains to be noticed one part of his personal history, perhaps the most illustrious of all.

Darius the Mede, by the appointment of Cyrus, succeeded Belshazzar in the kingdom, now become but an appendage to the Persian empire. In some way or other, the foreigner placed on the throne had become apprised of the value of the illustrious captive, and placed him at once in the very highest

station. It was verily worth that the country should be conquered—that *any* country should—if the consequence might be that the most eminent wisdom, virtue, piety on earth, should be set over it.—The prophet cared nothing about the *legitimacy* of the reigning chiefs,—they were all alike to him. Indeed the best proof of the monarch's *right* was his being disposed to choose the most tried and illustrious virtue and wisdom in his dominions, to be raised to the supreme authority in their affairs. It was a bright day for Babylon when Daniel was thus appointed. He, this one great statesman, was not ambitious, for he would flatter no monarch to obtain his favours; and he would not keep them at the expense of one slightest violation of his fidelity to the King of Heaven. Indeed, we may be assured that his very acceptance of such honours and cares was simply and solely in obedience to the Highest Authority.

It was certain enough that his fidelity, his conscience, would not remain long exempt from an effectual trial. So must every good man expect, who is to have much to do with the world. It was resolved to *ruin* him, as the phrase is—a phrase at which he would have smiled. But it was not to be avowed that this was to be on account of his *superlative virtue*; and, unfortunately, his conspiring enemies could find no other crime. Then, they must make a new kind of crime; and one really would have liked to know whether they thought he would not dare to commit it. But indeed, it does seem likely that they expected he would so dare, as they could venture to put all on this hazard. What a testimony

to his principles ! They were quite right in judging that the proper way of beginning, was to flatter the monarch's pride and self-importance. And they must well have known their man—to have ventured, even on the strength of all the eastern extravagance of adulation to royalty, to make such a proposal,—a decree that for an entire month no man should make prayer or petition to God or man, save to Darius, on pain of being cast into the den of lions ;—that *he* should take declared precedence of all on earth and in heaven !

If there should be an excessive drought or rain—not a word of supplication to any Immortal Power controlling the elements ;—if a pestilence—not one petitionary sacrifice for abating it ;—if a man were sick, he must not request a physician to visit him ;—if fallen into a pit, not call out for assistance ;—if his house were on fire, not entreat his neighbours to help to put it out ;—if famishing, not ask for a morsel of bread ;—if a man had offended or injured his brother, he must not ask him to forgive ;—if the gods (as he a heathen might easily surmise) should be angry at this suspension of their worship, they were not even to be entreated to have patience till the king's time was up !

The poor mortal, however, was caught, on the side of his foolish and impious self-importance. He signed the irreversible decree, and all followed just as was desired. It is not unlikely, however, that these virtuous courtiers had made all possible preparation of spies on Daniel. They suspected he would pray ; but might think he would take some precaution to

conceal so dangerous a fact. But all prying vigilance was superfluous ; for he, "*as aforetime*," and with his windows unclosed, uncurtained, "*prayed and gave thanks before his God, three times a day*." A striking admonition against subterfuges in duty and religion ; against contrivances at once to quiet conscience, and preserve an immediate self-interest. Especially in every trial of religious integrity which is to be conspicuously public, under the observant attention of men, to seem to forego a principle, is to do it in fact.

The great point appeared now to be gained ; for the king himself was as much in the power of the bad men as Daniel was. He struggled earnestly—but too late and in vain ; and Daniel went to the den. Very strange would appear the readiness, the tranquillity, the serenity, with which he would be seen to go thither. We cannot know whether he had any divine intimation that he had no enemies to apprehend in that dreadful receptacle. But his resolution, and even his calmness, would not depend on whether he had or not. He was soon in the midst of his appointed companions. If it was night or evening (as it appears to have been), his sight would meet, on every side, that direful lustre which appears in the eyes of these formidable animals ; but to him they were as the lamps of heaven, or a reflection of a divine presence there ; a far more pleasing light than those brilliant ones which were in the same hour burning in the splendid apartments of the malignant, and now rejoicing lords, who had accomplished his doom ; or in the palace of the

great king, who was sad and horror-struck at having sealed it. We can even imagine these terrible beasts showing, for their first and last time, a bland and caressing character,—such as may be supposed when the first of their race passed before Adam in Paradise, and did a kind of homage to the human lord of the world.

But the angel of the Lord, too, was there ; perhaps visibly ; or perhaps perceived only in the miraculous influence which controlled and suspended the fierce temperament of the inhabitants of the den. However it were, Daniel had no impatience to leave his abode and society. He might perform his devotions there, with more than even his accustomed elevation of piety, and with no malignant eyes of his enemies upon him. And in the morning he could answer the king (calling to him with “*a lamentable voice*,”) that this fearful night—as all would have imagined it—had been to him, as the tranquillity and felicities of heaven.

Such honours have been conferred on exalted piety. And who, then, would not wish to be a devoted servant of the Almighty ?

December 10th. 1823.

LECTURE XV.

THE THREE JEWS IN BABYLON.

DANIEL iii.

“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon,” &c.

IN our last exercise of this kind, we attempted a brief review of the life and character of the Prophet Daniel, but not dwelling at all on this splendid secondary narrative of his three friends; nor yet at that time intending to make it the future subject of more extended observation.

But we do not know that we can much better employ an hour of our time than in the contemplation of such a spectacle.

For, as to any selected topic being peculiarly appropriate to this particular season or day, we may presume that scarcely any one here can regard that notion in any other light than as a relic of superstition and ecclesiastical imposition. Even if this day were certainly known to be the true anniversary of our Lord's coming to the earth, that would not be a competent reason for attributing to it a special sanctity — unless there were some dictate of the

Divine will as the authority for doing so. But the fact is, there is no ascertaining of the day or anything near it. Even the evangelists seem not to have known it. One of them says, Jesus Christ was "*about*" such an age. The whole matter therefore is but an arbitrary institute of superstition ; that same superstition which, in numberless other instances, has not only connected a fanciful and false importance with particular facts, but also falsely asserted, or feigned the facts themselves. (Thus, relics of the saints and martyrs, pieces of the cross, &c.)

All days are just equally proper, (all in which men can have the freedom and command of their thoughts,) for grateful remembrances of the advent of our Lord.

And also any portion of our time and thought that is free, may be well employed in contemplating a striking example of fidelity to God. This before us is a very bright and memorable one. It is true it is a brightness surrounded by gloom, and the more splendid by that contrast.

It is truly a sad and awful spectacle,—to behold a great monarch, and the personages representing the population of a great empire, with perhaps a numerous throng of the common people, assembled for such a purpose. Consider what man should be on earth ! Reflect, that the right state would have been, that all mankind should be intelligent and solemn worshippers of the true God, of him alone ; the merely right state, below which, the scene becomes a spectacle of horror and misery, for the vital principle of all good is wanting.

Think, then, of that great empire, that prodigious multitude of human spirits (and nearly all the rest of mankind being sunk equally low) ready to prostrate themselves in adoration of a figure of metal, from the hands of the artificers. Look at them in such prostrations, all over the world, and say, *that man is not fallen!* Between that state, and the simply, merely, right state, how awful the difference! What intelligence must that be, that could measure the stupendous distance!

In the incalculable human mass of a whole idolatrous world, we are shown here and there an individual, or a diminutive combination of individuals, little shining particles, specimens of what the right state of the world would have been. But if they were specimens of no more than what was right—then, what power of thought can estimate, what language describe—that condition of the general substance, from which they shine out in contrast? The right state of the sun, is to be one full orb of radiance; that though there be some small spots and dimmer points, it should be in effect a complete and glorious luminary. Imagine, then, if you can, this effulgence extinguished, and turned to blackness, over all its glorious face, excepting here and there a most diminutive point, emitting one bright ray like a small star. What a ghastly phenomenon! and if it continued so, the utter ruin of the system.

But such, in the history before us, we behold the condition of the human race,—of which that empire was so large a province. We behold three men true and faithful in the grand essential principle, among

the innumerable host that were sunk, debased, and lost, as to that which is the supremely essential matter to man. In other pagan lands, however, in the same age, there was not *one* such. In Babylon, a few.

Observe ; it is quite in the nature of things that prevailing evil should be ambitious to prevail *entirely* ; should strive to overpower, and absorb, the little good that stands out in distinction and opposition. And here it was to be brought to the trial, whether any would dare refuse to be idolaters, in conformity to the whole great assemblage.

The history of the design, on the part of the monarch would be curious, if we could know it. How he should conceive such a project. Were there not gods enough in his city and empire, for all the worship and offerings, for which the people could spare time and cost ? And did it not obviously threaten great confusion in the notions and appointed services of the established religion, thus to force in *another* deity, with all his new demands and ritual ? a new article in the creed, a new order of priests, &c. to produce increased perplexity about which god to apply to in any emergency ? The thing least strange in the case, was, perhaps, (for he was *man*) that he should forget what he had learned by experience of the God of Daniel, though, by his own confession at the time, "*a God of gods*," and superior to all known in his empire or in the world. But, then, was the new god to excel both all them, and that God too ? If not, what need ? and what just claim ? and what was to make him thus excel ?

It is a surmise of some learned men (Grotius) that

it might be designed as the act of deifying, or rather of expressing and proclaiming the deification of, his deceased father. At any rate, a very leading prompter in the affair was, the monarch's own self-importance. It was for him to show himself lord of even the religion of his subjects. It was for him to constitute a god for them, if he pleased. It was for him to decree a faith, and rites, and ceremonies—and penal statutes to enforce them;—to stand forward thus before his subjects the very front and supremacy of *all* power both in heaven and earth—to “*exalt himself above all that is called god, and that is worshipped,*” 2 Thess. ii. 4. (We need not observe, how much there has been of the same spirit and practice in all nations and ages.)

Then there was the process; an examination of the public, or rather the royal treasures;—the gold collected and computed;—the consultation and employment of artificers;—operations of the smithery;—frequent statements or inspections of the progress;—perhaps reports circulated through the empire, of the grand business that was going on. When at length, bellows, hammers, and chisels, had created a god, he was dragged as a load, on some strong carriage, to the appointed spot, and there mounted to the elevation of sixty cubits in the air, pedestal included, else there would be a total disproportion between the height and breadth assigned. It is not probable that it could be a solid statue, at least, not solid of gold.

It is most likely that the imperial mandate to the great men of all the provinces had been despatched

some while before, appointing the time ; and that the idol was erected but just immediately against the specified day.

This grand assembly was summoned for the act of dedication,—that is, a solemn recognition and celebration of the object as a god, including the first adoration, after which it should be, perpetually and without question, an object of divine honours.

The great men had been summoned as a kind of representatives of all the people of the empire. Perhaps not one of them failed to be there, from any principle of conscience against idolatry. And as to the willingly compliant conduct of the assembly, one is a little disposed to wonder at the king's having made ready such an expedient of persuasion, as that which he points at, to enforce his command,—that is, the furnace, which was prepared and conspicuous, near the station of the monarch and the idol—and was, no doubt, already glowing and flaming—large too, as afterwards appears, like a wide pit or gulf of fire. He certainly had not been accustomed to experience any disobedience to his commands. Why, then, such an argument of persuasion at hand ? This might be, for mere despotic pomp—to impress terror of the very thought of such a thing as disobedience. But it may be suspected that this was possibly done at the instigation of the haters of Daniel and his three friends. These three men were on the ground, among the other persons in high office. It had been in vain for them to absent themselves, if they had been inclined to do so. But they had higher orders to be there ! orders which they dared not disobey,

though we shall soon see what *else* they could, without hesitation, set at defiance. Their faith was warned of another Monarch, and also of another fire! a proper fear of whom, and of which, will overcome all other fear. “*Fear not them who can kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do; but fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.*” They were certain to be at the place, without any force used by their enemies; for, they knew it could not be permitted by their “*Master in heaven*” that his servants should be in a conspicuous station, in a heathen land, without bearing on them the most explicit marks to whom they belonged. They were assured that, in the present case, there must not be allowed a grand triumphant day to idolatry and the impious pride of power,—undisturbed by at least a protest in the name of the Almighty. Was it for them, when their eternal Lord was to be dishonoured, to slink away into a base impunity? And, besides, were they to give to their own people, in captivity there, the lesson and example of betraying, even negatively, their religion, the only true one on earth? They knew their duty, and addressed themselves to perform it.

It would seem that this duty devolved on them alone. A question might arise concerning the numerous other Jews then in Babylon,—what became of them? Were they placed out of account on this grand occasion? It has been conjectured, in answer, that, as this was to be the solemn, primary act of sanctioning, authorizing, establishing, the new worship, the common people might, in this first instance,

be left out of the account, as being held of no weight ; that it was the chief men only of the empire that were wanted, or held of any value for this purpose. The citation, therefore, was perhaps only to them, and so the Jewish common people were not required to be present. And there is no mention of any Jews in high official station but these three, except Daniel, who, for some cause not recorded, was necessarily absent.

There were, then, three men come on the ground under the fearful vocation to brave the authority, and power, and wrath, of a lofty potentate,—the indignation of all his mighty lords, and the rage of a devouring fire. We admire heroic self-devotement in all other situations,—we are elated at the view, for instance, of Leonidas and his small band calmly taking their station in Thermopylæ, in the face of countless legions. But here was a still nobler position taken, by men who were fit to take it, because they were sure not to desert it. And it would betray a most corrupt state of our sentiments, if heroic devotement displayed for God,—for truth,—for religion,—do not affect us as sublimer than all other heroism.

We may suppose the utmost calmness—the most unostentatious manner in these three men ; *that* belongs to real invincible fortitude. And they had no occasion to begin with parade—to make a flourish of premature zeal ! Exhibition enough was to come erewhile ! They were “ *to be made a spectacle to God, and to angels, and to men.* ” They quietly waited, looking at the monarch, the idol, and the fire.

They, probably, did not even speak to one another. There was nothing they could need to say ; it was past the time for consulting, questioning, or mutual exhortation. They were in the wrong place, if anything remained to be yet decided.

But think of the brief interval of suspense and silence, between the conclusion of the herald's proclamation, and the first note of the signal-music ! What would be their sensations in waiting for it to strike ? Think of the intensity of listening ! How *much* the soul may be said to live during such moments, when not amazed and stupified ! The suspense was not long ; time was not to be wasted, by either the powers below, or the Power above. The haughty lord of the whole scene was eager,—the furnace was blazing :—the music sounded,—and all fell to the earth ! all the proudest personages of the empire prostrate ! And at whose dictate—under what conviction,—were they thus submissively performing, in appearance at least, the most solemn act that human, that created beings can ? The mere dictate of a creature, that was one day to become dust ;—the conviction that if they did not adore whatever he was pleased to decree a god, they should incur his vengeance.

Thus this proud, and numerous, and lordly assembly acknowledged that neither their bodies nor their souls were their own. But so acknowledged, too, the three men that remained standing upright. *Their* bodies and souls were not theirs to surrender, to a monarch or to an idol. They belonged to another Power ; and to him their bodies, if he should so

appoint, were to be offered in sacrifice, on that altar which was flaming full in their view.

It were going, perhaps, quite to the extreme of possibility, if we should suppose in them such perfect self-possession, that they could look around with regret and compassion on this wide field of prostrate and degraded humanity. But they had not long to look ; there were vigilant eyes on them, though it seems, not those of the king himself. His devotions were interrupted, and turned into surprise and indignation, by accusers of these three men. These accusers well understood their profession. With artful malice they advert to favours and honours the king had conferred on the accused, in order to aggravate the charge of disobedience, by an implication of peculiar ingratitude. And then, with the true address of sycophant courtiers, they put the alleged *impiety* in the form of *disloyalty*. It was as against *him* that the offence was committed, more than against the god. “*They have not regarded thee, O king !*” And this very effective art has never been forgotten by the haters and persecutors of the protesters in behalf of true religion. In their zealous charges and movements against heresy, schism, separation,—they have always taken care, first and last, to insist, with peculiar stress, on this point, of its being a flagrant offence against the state, the government,—an insult to the reigning powers. And this compound of malignant hypocrisy and vile servility has *yet* a great part to play in the world.

The three recusants of Babylon were instantly ordered into the royal presence. And the potentate,

powerless over the "*rage and fury*" which agitated him, did yet display some remainder of a reasonable disposition. The truth of the accusation was not to be doubted ; but he expressed his amazement at their conduct, as what he could hardly believe against them. He signified that the past should go unpunished, and he would consider them as only *now* brought to the test ; so that, had they shrunk or repented, it was not too late ; at the same time, positively denouncing the consequence of refusal, with a fire in his visage which seemed like the reflection of those flames which were burning for them, not far off ; and warning them not to deceive themselves by a vain trust in any superior power. "*Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands ?*"

He had not to wait for their decision. "*We are not careful to answer thee in this matter ;*" meaning, "we have no thought or deliberation to give to the alternative ; no question or hesitation remains to us ; we seek no evasion or delay ; our decision is absolute, because our duty is plain." And in direct intentional contradiction to what he had arrogantly and impiously said, in contempt of the power of any god, they say, they have a propitious and almighty God, who can deliver ; and if he shall not, they not the less owe him, and will render him, fidelity even to death ; satisfied in that case, that the sacrifice is required for his glory, and that he will reward it elsewhere.

Ver. 17. "*If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and*

he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king." Ver. 18.
"*But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*"

Some learned critics have given, as more exactly expressive of the sense of the original, an altered construction of the two verses together, thus, "*Whether our God, who is able to deliver us, shall deliver us or not, be it known unto thee,*" &c. ; thus taking away the apparent expression of their assurance that he would deliver them. We cannot know in what degree they did expect any extraordinary divine interposition, but this construction of their reply exhibits them in a still higher, completer, character of magnanimity and devotement. Such a magnanimity,—which the emperor might know there was but one other person among all his great men capable of evincing,—might have struck him with reverential admiration, — might have thrown him back on his reflections and remembrance, for he could not but recollect something of the God of Daniel and his friends. But no ; pride and anger had the ascendant in that hour ; it was not for *him* to be baffled, and to yield, in the face of such an assembly. In the utmost extremity of fury, he ordered the fire to be augmented to a corresponding intensity. "*Seven times hotter,*"—a phrase not of strict numerical import, but meaning the utmost intensity possible, by means of the most effectual fuel that could in haste be supplied. This, it may be said, could not be an unwelcome circumstance to the appointed victims, as securing, if they were to die,

the shorter duration of the suffering. Our martyr, RIDLEY, slowly consuming at the stake, earnestly entreated, "*Give me more fire—more fire!*" And the same thing is recorded of the victims in some of the infernal sacrifices of the inquisition. Still, however, in the instance before us, it was a preparatory operation not to be looked upon with indifference. The devouring monster grew awfully larger in their sight, as if a still mightier fiend glowed and glared in it ; and the aggravated roar of the furnace would not sound exactly like the notes of the dulcimer which had preceded.

The binding of these three men was a very superfluous act. But it had a certain judicial appearance ; and it exposed them more formally in the character of criminals and victims. They were bound in their garments (ver. 21), that is, not by means of their garments, used as bonds, but bound as they were, with their complete dress upon them. The parts of that dress are specified in English denominations very little appropriate to the eastern forms of vesture ; such a term as "*hats,*"* for instance, ought not to have been admitted into the description.

"*The most mighty men*" of the soldiers were ordered out to bear them to the fire. And it was become so fierce and tremendous that they could not go near enough to perform this office effectually, without being themselves scorched to death ; but they durst not stop short, for the royal fury drove them impetuously to the deed. The command was as "*urgent*" and terrible on the one side, as the fire on the other.

* "*Turbans.*"—Eng. marg. reading. (ED.)

If the music had been suspended, it would probably be here renewed, it being a customary accompaniment, anciently and to this day, of the most horrid rites of paganism. And now the consummation, the crowning sanction, would seem to be added to the establishment and authority of the new divinity and worship, by a human sacrifice. But the matter was not so to end. It might so have ended without impeachment of the divine Governor of the world, with respect to these his faithful servants ; for he has a right to demand an absolute martyrdom—an actual surrender of life for his cause, and often has required it. But, in this instance, if it had so ended, it would have appeared to the whole empire, like a complete triumph and sanction gained to idolatry.

There would be, among the great men of the assembly, much self-congratulation that *they* were no such insane and desperate fanatics. And we may doubt whether much of their compassion, or even admiration, attended the three faithful to so magnanimous an exit ; for invincible bravery for conscience and the true religion, was, among heathens, immeasurably less accounted of, than courage displayed in any other way. It was remarkably so in the case of the primitive Christians. The personal enemies of these three men, (and many such they must have had, who hated them for their incorruptible public virtue)—*these*, too, had now their moment of lively gratification.

But the idolatrous chiefs and lords had not *all* the delight to themselves, that there was at that moment, on that field,—the most animated exultation of all,

was glowing amidst the flames of the furnace ! *There* was what they might all have envied, as they envied sometimes the delights attributed to the high condition of their gods. The three men bound, were cast into the furnace. Think of the moment of their falling in ! It is beyond our faculties to conceive the first sensations of men, suddenly plunged into the midst of a vast mass of fire, of the most raging intensity, in their living, susceptible bodies, which even a spark would have hurt, and yet feeling no pain, no terror.

We may imagine a momentary amazement, but quickly changed into a full consciousness of exquisite delight. It is beyond our power, however, to bring such a fact to our comprehension. Consider, it is according to natural laws and relations, that pleasure is produced, that is, the constituted condition of human pleasure. But when, in a rare instance, by the divine will and agency, pleasure is to arise from a perfect and stupendous reversal of those natural laws, we are thrown off from any power and means for estimating that pleasure. It belongs to a different economy ; the recipients are not then within the bounds and order of mere mortal existence, and their pleasure may approximate or partake of the quality of that of superior beings. St. Paul was evidently once in this undefinable and mysterious state.

The attention of Nebuchadnezzar seems to have continued fixed on the fiery receptacle, perhaps with some relenting for what he had done ; possibly with some degree of doubt, or suspense of expectation,

respecting the consequence. He seems to have been the first to perceive that his fury, and the doom he had awarded, were frustrated. And with that prompt kind of honesty which appears conspicuous in his character, he was the first to proclaim it. When immediate evidence rose before him, though to confound and reproach him, he never stayed to digest his mortification, or to seek some saving retreat for his pride. He proclaimed instantly that the three men and another were walking, unhurt, in the midst of the fire. And he did not send some official messenger, but went himself to hail, and call them forth ; he ardently wished them with him again. But they were in far superior society ; the angel of God was there, a form "like a son of God," (as Bishop Lowth observes it ought to be expressed.) The angel was, by his nature, no subject of the power of fire ; and, for the time, his human companions were exalted to the same condition, by the encircling power of the Almighty.

Nebuchadnezzar loudly called them to come forth. Had he any authority to do so ? He might have left it to the discretion of their splendid visitant and associate, to lead them forth when he should judge it the proper time. This once, they were clearly beyond the monarch's jurisdiction. He had, in intention, sent them out of the world ; and therefore, as to *him*, they possessed the privilege and exemption of departed spirits ; and they were seen actually associated with a being that belonged not to the earth. As to the monarch, that space of fire was as a tract of another world. And besides, they could have no

wish to come forth. It was the sublimest, most delightful region they had ever dwelt in yet. In their state of feeling, that burning floor was preferable to the marble pavements of his superbest palace, nay, preferable to any spot that Adam trod in the garden of Eden, with the first green and flowers of the new world,—the charm of primeval beauty. Those waving and darting fires, as ^{ascending} ~~piercing~~ aloft above them, were richer in delight than the blooming arbours of Paradise ; for Divinity was more *sensibly* present there ;—a situation different from Eden in this signal circumstance, that there angels walked with man, in a scene where man was naturally safe, — was at home ;—whereas here men walked with an angel, in a place where, by natural laws, the angel alone could have walked or lived. So can the Almighty make all the elements of the creation subservient to the felicity of those that love him !

Nebuchadnezzar called them forth,—but it was a spot (the single one in his dominions), where the imperial monarch durst not go to bring them forth, nor any in his army ; it was interdicted ground ! At length the three men came out from the fire,—their celestial companion being left to depart, like Manoah's angel, who ascended in the flame. They were looked upon by the amazed and humiliated assembly of grandees ; and the effect of fire had not passed on their very garments or their hair. The king forgot or scorned his idol, and once more “ *blessed and adored the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.* ” He justly promoted them

in the kingdom ; but he had no honours to confer, after what heaven had made to shine and flame upon them on that great day. He could not confer honour on those who had triumphed over him and his gods. And as to them, there could remain, after that day, but one thing more that was sublime enough for their ambition,—*the translation by Death !*

December 25, 1823.

LECTURE XVI.

THE MEETING OF FRIENDS.

EXODUS xviii. ~~17~~ 7th verse.*“ They asked each other of their welfare.”*

As the present is a season more remarkable perhaps than any in the year for *the meeting of friends*, there may be a degree of appropriateness in a text like this. It mentions part of what occurred at the meeting of two such friends as could not meet, without being, on both sides, the better for it. Happy! if this were a description generally applicable to the meeting of friends. These two were, though of very different ages, very old friends, for Moses had lived forty years with Jethro in Midian. So that they had been combined in all the domestic interests; the welfare of each was a concern in common; there had been ten thousand acts of mutual kindness and respect.

To have had a man like Moses so long an associate and inmate must have been a privilege of the highest order,—“*all the wisdom of the Egyptians*,” combined with a larger measure of divine wisdom than was possessed by any other man on earth,—and all this

softened, and dignified, by the mild virtues, and a devotional spirit. For such a man to go away, must have been an incalculable loss ; and a loss which so long a residence with his friends would have precluded all apprehension of. But, he had a higher destiny, and was summoned away. It was not ambition that prompted him to go. It may be presumed that his friends would understand the nature of that mandate which compelled him to depart. No information is given to assist conjecture what degree of knowledge of the true God might be possessed in this family of Midian. It might have been extremely imperfect, and mixed and confounded with heathen superstition, before Moses came there. But it is quite impossible to believe, that he should not have faithfully, earnestly, and habitually, endeavoured to impart and inculcate *his* knowledge of that essential subject ;—impossible, too, that he could so long have remained happy among them, and have been so reluctant to leave them, if they had been idolaters. And at this interview, Jethro makes the most explicit and animated avowal of his faith in the God of Israel.

When this inestimable friend and sojourner went away, a profoundly affectionate regard would follow him, accompanied by an unceasing inquisitiveness respecting the progress of his enterprise ; a conjectural inquisitiveness, for probably there were little means of knowing. But all conjecture would fall immensely short of what he was to become, and to accomplish in the land of Egypt. No human imagination the most elated, the most enthusiastic, could have divined that the gentle domestic associate,

the contented keeper of the flocks, the contemplative solitary of the desert, was soon to rise up, a majestic and portentous representative and agent of the Almighty;—to confound all the human wisdom, and baffle all the diabolic power, in the land of Egypt;—to dictate to a proud monarch;—to give the signal for the most astonishing and tremendous judgments;—and at length, to lead out a great people, triumphantly delivered, and to be miraculously sustained in that very desert on the border of which he had tended the flocks of Jethro.

But may we not presume, that, if amidst these magnificent transactions, there was any room for remembrance in the mind of Moses, Jethro would not be forgotten? There might be moments in which his thoughts would glance back to the peaceful scene, and he might even imagine his excellent friend supplicating the Almighty to protect him. At length Jethro heard that the grand enterprise was accomplished, and that Moses was in the wilderness at the head of an innumerable host. He made a journey to see him, taking with him the family of Moses. The account of the greetings and discourse is a delightful picture of primitive friendship between wise and pious men. We might particularly observe upon it that the highest order of excellence inspires confidence. Jethro was now almost at an immeasurable distance below Moses; but it is evident that he had not the slightest apprehension of not being received with the utmost kindness by the man now become so elevated and illustrious. And he felt he could express himself with the most perfect confidence in pointing out to

him a defect of judgment in the administration of his high office. Nothing more palpably betrays littleness, meanness, of soul, than a supercilious looking down on estimable friends, of inferior order, after a man has attained some unexpected elevation.

The account of this meeting may suggest, too, the worthiness of the social affections, when accompanied by wisdom and piety. Moses spared some portions of time from his high employments to indulge in the kind sentiment and intercourse ; and felt it quite in harmony with his most solemn duties. The time was occupied in asking and communicating information. Moses related to his father-in-law what he has recorded for us ; but imagine the history given by his own voice, and in the evident spirit of humility and adoring gratitude to God ! But the mind has not power to put itself in the condition of imagining, effectually, how strange and striking, to have heard the narration, as of just recent events, in which the relater was the chief human agent. Jethro expressed his congratulations in a fervent strain of devotion. After a short time, he returned to end his life where Providence had cast his lot, probably from its beginning. Both would remember this interview with a peculiar and perfect complacency ; they had tasted the best feelings of friendship, and had contributed to each other's instruction and religion.

Leaving now this illustrious example of friendship, we may proceed to make a few general observations.

One obvious one is, that this world is not a scene adapted or intended to afford the pleasure and benefit of friendship *entire*. Jethro was to lose his

inestimable friend, after long, and what must have been the happiest intimacy ;—was to see him once again ;—again to lose him, to see him on earth, probably, no more. What a measure, we may almost say, of his vital existence, this was to lose ! Providence has, in numerous instances, interposed wide spaces of land, or even sea, between persons who might be inestimable to one another in near and habitual association. The one mind,—and the other, —and the third, and many more, are filled with exercises of thought, with emotions, with affections, which would glow with social and sympathetic animation, if they could be one another's companions. But they have each their own assigned positions to occupy,—their own moral tract to cultivate,—their own duties, labours, trials—and sometimes little happy in their actual associates : they have to fulfil their vocation amidst coldness, perversity, or imbecility, thinking, sometimes, how different the case would be if such, and such, were their companions and co-operators.

How many, again, there are, who are total strangers to one another, even in name, who would be happily congenial if they could be brought into communication—but never will in this world. While, perhaps, amidst their unparticipated sentiments and unaided projects or efforts, for improvement, or for the promotions of some good cause, they are musing at intervals on such imagined beings as would be congenial co-operators ; “*if* such wisdom, such courage, such piety, such zeal, such superiority to selfishness were with me here !”—and somewhere,

they are sure, there are such, but not for them. Many that are acquainted, but far asunder, and would be happy to obtain even an interview of any moderate duration, are destined to meet no more. Their different paths into another world are never even to cross each other again in this ; though perhaps in youth they had with sanguine confidence formed their scheme for inseparable society and co-operation through life ; but some unthought-of cause, some sudden emergency, some compulsion of temporal circumstances, arose to give their schemes and hopes to the wind. There are some who would be of great value to one another, if they were placed so as to be within reach of easy and familiar access, for counsel, for aid, for mutual stimulus, who can have this advantage but occasionally, seldom, and transiently.

But it is right after all that the case should be thus. They see they cannot draw and retain around them whomsoever they would as the most desirable co-operators for obtaining the good of life, and for averting its evils. They cannot collect and keep an assemblage of congenial spirits, to constitute, as it were, a bright social fire, ever glowing, ever burning, amidst the winter of this world. They have no magical power, to bring to their side, whenever they will, the clearest-sighted instructors and counsellors, the most disinterested and generous benefactors, or the bravest allies. They cannot surround themselves with the selectest portion of humanity, so as to keep out of sight and interference the general character of human nature. They are left to be pressed upon by

an intimate perception of what a depraved and unhappy world it is. And so they feel themselves strangers and pilgrims upon earth.

There is also another thing in the case. It is contrary to the design of God that the more excellent of this world's inhabitants should form together into little close assemblages and bands, within exclusive circles, detached as much as possible from the general multitude ; thus withdrawn from the commerce of the community ;—delighted in their own concentrated fraternity, and looking with aversion on all besides. On the contrary, it is appointed that they should be scattered and diffused, hither and thither, to be useful and exemplary in a great number of situations : that there should be no large space without some of them.

Thus it is a world that dissociates friends. Nevertheless friends do sometimes meet ; and then it is quite natural to do as Moses and Jethro did, “*ask each other of their welfare.*” For in such meetings there is, in a good measure, a suspension of the selfish principle, which is so powerfully kept in action in the more general intercourse with men,—there is a generous expansion in which the mind goes out beyond its own peculiar interests ;—the individual's circle widens, so as to intersect others, and involve with his own the interests of another. And the mind is delighted in thus surpassing its own limits. It escapes, as from imprisonment, into the light and warmth of sunshine. No imprisonment can be much worse than a contracted, cold, absolute, selfishness.

We may notice several kinds of feeling which prevail in the meeting, after considerable absence, of genuine friends. As, kind affection—inquisitiveness—reflective comparison, and one or two more.

I. *Kind affection*; what a difference between meeting an estimable friend, and meeting an entire stranger. Jethro encountered strangers on his road (and perhaps with a passing sentiment of benevolence); but when he came in sight of Moses! When true friends meet, it is the recalling together of beings who have on both sides been for a while blended and partially lost in the wide stranger community. They have many living recollections, firmly associated with each other in the mind; with many added associations of kindness, the cement of the association. There is the confidence of a certain harmony mutually existing within. The sense of having a great many kind thoughts and feelings to give, as it were, all at once, that have been accumulating during past time. The sympathy extends to a great many things at once, or in quick succession. The images quickly rise to view of things that have affected the welfare separately of each,—any important crisis—an affliction—an injury suffered—a danger—an escape—a successful enterprise,—an anxious deliberation,—the acquisition of some valuable good.

II. *Inquisitiveness*. “*Asked each other.*” And the mutual inquiries respecting “*welfare,*” are made in a spirit very different from unmeaning complaisance. When a friend is far away it will sometimes occur to wonder and to imagine how he may be situated, how employed. What at this time is the exercise of his

mind? what part is he in of the process of an undertaking? what evil dispositions of his fellow mortals is he conflicting with? what temptations is he beset by? When they meet the inquiry goes back to such things. And it is gratifying to give the history to one who is kindly interested by it at every step. And friendship will suggest many comments which would not occur to the thoughts of an indifferent person. It may be very advantageous for the instruction and improvement of the friends that they have moved a great deal apart; so as to have had a very different experience—different views of the world and of providence. Thus they bring in a much larger store to the combined account,—enlarge one another's knowledge—correct and mature one another's judgment.

III. And this will involve *reflective comparison*; not an invidious, but an instructive one. The strangely different paths in which God has led. What are the peculiar improvements of each? By what manner of exercising the mind were they made? In what manner have we respectively improved our advantages? In what degree have we each taken (so to express it) a colour from the different scenes we have passed? What is there in our different attainments by which we can the most benefit each other? Which of us is more fit for one line of usefulness in the service of God and men, and which for another? And how wise an adjustment has it been that has made us thus to differ!

IV. Once more; *gratitude to God* is always, in pious minds, a feeling attending these interviews and

inquiries. So with Moses and Jethro. A wonderful preservation, that we are still alive! how many dreadful possibilities of disaster! Often a friend would have been alarmed, if he could, at the instant, have been fully aware of the situation of the friend at a distance. Perhaps within an inch of destruction; perhaps in a storm on the ocean; perhaps the intended object of some malignant design; but always exposed to the peril of sin and Satan. Each says, "Heaven be praised that you have come on with safety thus far!" The friends, separate and perhaps at great distance, could render no material assistance to each other; each committed apart to the wide world. But a Greater Friend than all has incessantly watched over both. Therefore, one of the truest acts of friendship when they meet will be to adore and thank God on each other's account,—to "*build an altar to the Lord.*"

We may, to close, add two or three more duties of friends when they meet; namely, *faithful admonition*, and *serious anticipation*. They must be a most rare and singular example of friends, if nothing should be mutually seen for *admonition*. Very often the respective parties very distinctly perceive something to which they wish an admonitory suggestion could be applied. It is certainly one of the most difficult things in friendship to do this; and the manner of it should be skilful. But it is rather a slight friendship where this cannot be done at all, in any manner. And it is not a friendship of any great esteem or attachment where the parties do not think it worth while to endeavour to assist each other to become

wiser and better. In truth, there should be much more of an understanding among friends that this is an object to be kept in view. Might not real ones solicit this of each other, and endeavour such a repression of their own vanity and self-complacency that it might be confidently ventured without offence? Let it be considered whether any man can receive a greater benefit from his friend than assistance to correct his errors and faults. And again we ask, why might not this be done in a perfectly amicable spirit and manner? When valuable hints of advice,—suggestions for self-observation,—remarks of just reprehension,—could be administered, and in perfect kindness, why must it be left to some moment of a friend's provoked displeasure to say such things; or left altogether to his enemies to say them? If it be the best of all things that the friends should please God, would it not be the very best principle of their attachment that they should avowedly, and on system, excite and instruct one another to do so?

The last thing is—*serious anticipation*. Each meeting should admonish them that their life is shortened (sometimes much shortened), since they met before. Sometimes they are forcibly struck by the change in each other's appearance. After a considerable absence they can hardly meet without having to name some one who has shared their society—but meets them no more. When they part, confessedly for a considerable absence, how possible is it that they are looking at each other for the last time! Let it be considered what a melancholy thing

any friendship would be, that should be destined to expire with all its pleasures and advantages, at death. That is the worthy and happy friendship, and that alone, where the parties are zealously preparing, and have a good hope, to meet in a nobler scene.

LECTURE XVII.

THE MEMORY OF THE JUST.

PROVERBS x. 7.

“The memory of the just is blessed.”

THE mind often goes back in review of the past human world. The vision stretches away, from the immediate past to the remotest ages,—from the point where we are standing to the remotest horizon of time. And on this great field there are presented all the grand varieties of character. They come to view in great divisions and assemblages—in mass, as it were—bearing the broad distinctions of their respective ages, nations, and religions. They are beheld placed in the crowded scenery of the events and transactions among which they lived. But here and there, in the throng of these great assemblages, individuals stand up conspicuously to view—of extraordinary and pre-eminent character and action. Such pre-eminence in their time they must have had to remain now conspicuous in the far-off retrospect, or even to be seen from the shorter distance of a few ages or a century. When we come down to the time

within our own memory, some that were not in themselves eminently remarkable, are often individually brought to our recollection.

Now reflect, in what different lights, in what different aspects of character, the human beings of past time are presented to our thoughts. How many of them are there, that an odious and horrid character perpetually rests upon ! They seem to bear eternal curses on their heads. A vindictive ray of heaven's lightning seems continually darting down upon them. They appear as the special points of communication and attraction between a wicked world and the divine vengeance. Cain stands high in sight, stained with a brother's blood. There are all the bloody conquerors,—the cruel tyrants,—the persecutors of the servants of God,—the unjust judges. Also the enemies of truth, and perverters of the human mind ;—the inventors of false religions ;—the grand impostors ;—the contrivers of a system to falsify and debase the religion of Christ itself, to subserve the worst passions and purposes on earth ;—the great infidel labourers and zealots for the subversion of divine truth ;—the profligate men of talents and genius, who have devoted their utmost energy to deprave their fellow mortals. And more within the compass of our own actual knowledge, various individuals malignantly wicked, odious in disposition, speech, and conduct. We have but to add the great and countless multitude, collectively, that have gone away into the past, and are there indistinctly seen, as strangers to religion and holiness, and enemies of God. And what an awful retrospect

is all this ! A race, whose business here, every one, was to serve God,—to grow into wisdom and excellence,—to do good to one another,—to mature and prepare for another life. And all these gone away into another state, another world, and that a state of retribution ! And gone in that same character, unaltered, in which they lived on earth ! And think ! here on earth, indeed, they are now only subjects of history or objects of memory,—only images of the mind ; they do not actually with their presence darken the living scene any longer ; but *somewhere*, they are actual existences, in the full reality of the properties they bore away with them. And reflect,—if sometimes the mind, in contemplative mood, feels an awful sense of evil—feels something at which it shudders and recoils, in but entering closely among the very images of them, what would it be to be in their actual presence ? to be plunged among them, with all their evil in immediate living manifestation and action ? And those who are following them in the same spirit and course, what do they think of being added to such an assembly ? Do they expect to find them in a realm of peace ? Or that any heaven in the universe will smile auspicious over such a community ? Or that the continual accession to the dark host will exalt them into successful defiance of Almighty justice ? What do they think of the social condition and sympathies of such an assemblage continually augmented ? Which of all the charities of existence can live in a continual condensation of evil ? Can the effect be other than the mutual explosion of deadly flames ?

They who are themselves going, as fast as time can carry them, toward another world, should consider whom, what class, they are going after, and to be added to. And in order to press this consideration powerfully on the mind, it will be wise to dwell sometimes on the memory of the wicked ; always recollecting, as a warning excitement, that the same fallen nature, which appears under so dark an aspect and malediction in such a review,—that this very same nature is ours. And that for us there is an absolute necessity for the operation and the indwelling of the Divine Spirit, in order to secure that we shall be added to a better assembly when we shall pass away to remain no longer, but in memory, on earth.

This gloomy part of the retrospect will, by contrast, add to the lustre of the more pleasing one—*the memory of the just*.

There has been “*a multitude that no man can number*” bearing on earth, and bearing away from it, the true image of their Father in heaven ;—of many nations and languages,—of every age of time,—and of all conditions in mortal life. An infinite number of spots, if we may express it so, in time and place, have been marked by the fact of a just man,—in many instances more or many just men,—being there. The traveller in different portions of the earth is often, unknowingly, on a spot where a just man has stood,—walked,—meditated,—prayed,—perhaps died. It will sometimes occur to thought, when treading a long frequented path, how many have trodden it that are gone to heaven. A similar thought still more positively occurs in a place long dedicated to the true

worship of God. The saints of God in the past time are presented as a general comprehensive object to our memory ; while comparatively few of them are singly prominent in record or recollection,—we see with certainty, in the retrospect, a bright ample appearance composed of their multitude ; like that luminous tract in the starry heavens where we cannot (with the unassisted eye) distinguish individually the stars, but know that it is an incalculable profusion of them that constitutes the appearance. There may be some spirit's eye to which this vast tract of dim light in the sky is all resolved into its distinct lustres. And who can tell whether good men may not at length receive so mighty an enlargement of faculty as to be empowered to note individually all the good men of their whole race ? It must be a faculty capable of admitting a distinct perception of a vast variety of objects at once ; so different from the present state of our mental being, in which we can give a pointed special attention to but one object at once. But surely there is no difficulty to conceive that there may be a grand change in this respect hereafter.

But besides this view of "*the cloud of witnesses*," this innumerable assemblage, as it were, confused into one appearance, we have many of "*the just*" retained to memory as individuals. Some that will be memorable all over the Christian world, and to the end of time ; Patriarchs ;—Prophets ;—Apostles ;—the most eminent of the promoters of religion and truth, through the subsequent ages ;—some of the martyrs ;—the reformers ;—the missionaries ;—the philanthropists ;—an illustrious array of the noblest servants of

God, and benefactors of the world. And of more limited sphere, and in the private circle, some have been known to us who remain unalterably fixed and cherished in memory, in the character of "*the just.*" They abide there and ever will, kept alive as it were, the images, the examples, the personifications of what we approve, admire, and feel that we ought to love and to be.

Now, their memory "*is blessed,*" self-evidently so, for the mind blesses it,—reverts to it with complacency, mingled with solemnity,—returns to it with delight from the sight of the living evil in the world, sometimes even prefers this silent society to the living good. We can devoutly bless God that they were such,—and that as such we have had the happiness to know some of them. They show, in the most evident and pleasing manner, the gracious connexion which God has constantly maintained with a sinful world. His uninterrupted connexion with it by justice and sovereign power has been manifest in mighty evidence: but his saints have been the peculiar illustration of his grace, his mercy, acting on this world. Not all the repulsion of our evil nature could prevent his benignity coming in operative contact with it. Here and there, as it were with his finger, instinct with vivifying energy, which emanated from it, he has touched the dead corrupted mass, and imparted life, and wherever touched, it became sensible of the vital power; a soul rose up in spiritual life, to live for ever; and blessed the irresistible grace. Wherever such have been, their having been such has left a bright trace on the world, to testify that the

free mercy of God has been in communication with it ;—and so, their “ *memory is blessed.*”

It is so, again, when we consider them as practical illustrations, verifying examples of the excellence of genuine religion ; that it is a noble thing in human nature, and makes, and alone makes, that nature noble ;—that this is what redeems it to its station of being “ *a little lower than the angels ;*”—that whatever scoffers may say, or the vain world pretend to disbelieve, here is what has made such men as nothing else under heaven could or can. Here are the men that have been tried in all ways,—brought in conflict with every evil of the earth, and the principle was in them indestructible. The world and Satan have been compelled to acknowledge, “ *These are not ours.*” True, the genuine, living examples have this honour in common with those who are become the objects of “ *memory.*” But the difference in favour of the latter is, that the trial is completed,—the consummation is gained,—they shine “ *full-orbed*” from heaven. From heaven, we say,—and their memory is blessed, under the consideration that they are what the earth has contributed to heaven ;—that in them it has been shown that earth *may* send its inhabitants thither ;—that there *was* here what was judged not fit to be long confined and detained here. They appear as a conquest gained in this world, and taken away from it by the powers above,—a sacred, happy colony transplanted thither.

Their “ *memory is blessed,*” while we regard them as diminishing to our view the repulsiveness and horror of death. Our Lord’s dying was the fact that threw

out the mightiest agency to this effect. But, in their measure, his faithful disciples have done the same. When we contemplate them as having prepared for it with calm resolution,—as having approached it—multitudes with a tranquil resignation and fortitude,—and very many with an animated exultation ;—as having passed it, and emerged in brightness beyond its gloom ; they seem to shine back through the gloom, and make the shade less thick. It is not as if we were the first summoned to dare the solemn adventure. We have but to do what *they* have already done ; and the consideration that they, the most excellent of the earth, were to do it ;—next, to see how they have done it,—and then to look, by faith, to the consequences they have found ;—this makes their “*memory*” an auxiliary to us against the fear of death. And whatever does that, is indeed a blessed thing. That “*memory*,” again, contributes to promote the sense of a social relation with the state beyond the grave ; presenting to view, from the other side, a grand society, to which Christians here do stand in the noblest relations,—

“ The saints on earth, and all the dead,
But one communion make.”

There is, thus, a medium of human interest and combination between the two so different regions ; and the social sentiment can expand beyond the earth. While there cannot be a sensible intercommunication, a contemplative faith can carry a pious spirit, ideally, into the higher and happier society, so as to feel great delight,—a delight in which a certain

mystical social element is felt to mingle. And, then, this "*memory*" aids to vivify the anticipations of coming at length into actual communion,—to join some that have been personally known,—and some of former ages and distant lands.

Their "*memory is blessed*," also, as combined with the whole progress of the cause of God on earth,—with its living agency through every stage. He has never, and nowhere, had a visible cause in the world, without putting *men* in trust with it. There might be his own immediate interference,—there might, or not, be angels, visibly employed, but there were sure to be men. Think of what they have been employed and empowered to do,—in the propagation of truth,—in the incessant warfare against all manner of evil,—in the exemplification of all the virtues by which He could be honoured.

Thus their "*memory*" is inseparably associated with all the most blessed things through all time, and it partakes of the blessedness. All those things come to our view with a human visage ; and have, by that, a stronger interest and attraction for us, than if they had been mere, pure, acts of the Divine Power. Especially the important benefits that have come into our own immediate lot, reflect benedictions on the memory of those who imparted them. This grateful recollection often enhances the sense of the value of the good so imparted, and very much conduces to perpetuate it.

And now, is it not a reasonable object of Christian desire, to leave a memory that shall be "*blessed*?" Not a passion for vain-glory,—not that so-extolled

aspiring to endless fame. But a desire that the remembrance which will remain in the minds of those who are to survive or follow, should not be one causing pain, disapprobation, or shame. A wish to be, in remembrance, numbered with the faithful and zealous servants of God and Christ. A wish to be so associated with good imparted, as to render that good the dearer and the more effectual. A wish to remain, as long as remembered, a motive, an argument, an incitement to all good in those who follow,—thus to do good here after being gone hence. A wish to be remembered *so*, that it shall be, to some human hearts, a delightful and attractive thought, that they shall meet again the object of their memory.

And let it not be a mortifying consideration, that, in most instances the “*memory*” must be of very limited scope, and not perpetual duration. The “*memory*” of the good, with exceptions comparatively few, gradually declines into oblivion on earth, but their everlasting remembrance is with God. But their existence—their living, happy reality—continues, and flourishes, and enlarges for ever ; to have, also, the felicity of being ultimately brought again into the society of those in whose minds they have left a cherished remembrance.

LECTURE XVIII.

PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON.

Acts xii.

“ Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church,” &c.

ALL devout believers in revelation rejoice in a confident expectation that this world will at length become a place favourable to the servants of God. The view forward is the consolatory and animating one ; it is seen occupied, in the distance, with beautiful and glorious imagery. The prophetic light over it is, indeed, somewhat of the nature of twilight, but the prospect is most unequivocally that of a season, and a long season, in which the saints shall literally “*possess the earth*,” and shall have all things in their favour. Through a vast space of past time, there has been only a most diminutive number, on the whole earth, of such as truly knew, and feared, and served God. And during periods in which they have been a somewhat more perceptible portion of the race, think how the world has often treated them ; as if they were foreigners and intruders, occupying a place to which they had no right. A

very considerable portion of the history of the world is a record of the persecutions that have raged against them. Monarchs, with the co-operation of their counsellors, captains, priests, and the ignorant, brutish multitude, have even sought to make it a chief distinction and glory of their reigns, that they zealously endeavoured the destruction of the saints of the Most High. This, however, has often been a fatal course for the persecutors themselves. The history of the church abounds with instances of divine judgments, on both states and individuals, for their violence against the people of God.

The kingdom of God on earth is in real, vital, connexion with his kingdom in heaven ; so that there is—shall we say ?—a sympathy between them ; so that when a saint is smitten on earth, there is, as it were, a sensation conveyed to the upper sky. The Lord of saints and angels says, “*Saul, why persecutest thou me ?*” a strange expression of the union of the King of Glory and his humble mortal friends ! The mighty spirits that he has on high in his service, doubtless, take their share of interest in his kingdom below. Throughout the scriptures we see them prompt to come down, in aid and in avengement of his oppressed saints.

In the short chapter before us there is an account of the angel of the Lord coming twice—once to deliver Peter—then to smite Herod. Herod, who, having persecuted the apostles of Christ, filled up the measure of his wickedness by willingly accepting the title of a god from the base courtiers and people. They were worthy to have such a king, and even to

share his fate ; for what was the way for him to render himself so popular with them, that they should be ready to call him "*a god ?*" It was, to kill the Christians. He had killed James, "*and because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.*" Here was what had been the peculiar people to God, of all the people of the whole earth, sunk to the last barbarous depravity of the pagan nations. The most effectual expedient for the chief of their nation to gratify them was, to give them a show of human victims ; especially provided the sufferers were the disciples and advocates of true religion. So it was among the Romans, and other heathen nations. But so, too, has it since been, in nations bearing the Christian name ; as in the horrid spectacles exhibited by the Inquisition. These things "*pleased*" the people ; and their rulers, secular and spiritual, were most forward and liberal in affording them such pleasure, especially in the way of religious persecution. The malignity of human nature has appeared ten-fold malignant, when vented in the direction of hostility to true religion. It has then glared out a fiend, delighting and luxuriating in savage barbarity.

"*Killing James with the sword*" had so captivated the people, that Herod thought he had fallen on the very best method of courting the favour of his subjects. And it was fortunately one which cost no self-denial of his own royal disposition. He could at once please them and himself, and therefore "*proceeded to take Peter also.*" One flagrant crime facilitates the perpetration of the next. Herod

probably issued his command for the apprehension of Peter, with as little repugnance as he would have ordered a court-festival. In his recollection of James, no such idea obtruded itself in his mind, as that the martyred apostle had ascended as a "*swift witness*" against him to the throne of heaven. Whither he might suppose the departed saint did go, we cannot conjecture ; but he thought he might send another the same road without danger of ever hearing of it again, except in the demoniac applauses of his mob.

Peter would be easily found and taken. He, we may believe, had not absconded from affright at the fate of his fellow apostle. Cowardice in behalf of his Lord had been shown *once* before ; but that was the *last* time. The death of his great Master, and the love manifested toward Peter, after he rose again, had devoted Peter to die for him, whenever fidelity to his cause should require the sacrifice. He might even wish that the life, which, as a mortal, he must at all events surrender, should have the advantage of being surrendered as an act of testimony, rather than as a mere passive loss under a natural law. On a sober calculation, the act of dying for Christ might be held equivalent to very many acts of living service. As the death of Samson was, in one single act, a greater achievement for the Israelites than all he had performed during his previous life. The martyrs have, in the history of religion, and in the glories and rewards of heaven, this eminent precedence of the other faithful, that they performed, in dying, a great action, of as much value, probably, in

the divine account, as the zealous labours of many years of life. May we not venture to say, that the man who, at the age of fifty, died a martyr, lived virtually, in the value of service, to the age of sixty or seventy? However, the Great Judge can estimate the proportion right, and accordingly will be his award.

But we return to Peter. He was conveyed to prison. Do we follow him thither with compassion? We can imagine him looking—(if there was a sufficient glimmer of light)—looking round on the walls of his new abode, of impregnable thickness, with strong bars,—a dreary dismal shade,—ominous sounds; and chains on his limbs. “This it is,” he might say, “to be an avowed and faithful servant of Him that died for me.” But what if he said further—“Well I would rather be here and be thus, for such a cause, than be the lord of Herod’s, or of Cæsar’s palace.” And can any one doubt, that if he did feel and say so, he was right? While the body is in a palace, the soul may be in prison; whereas, while his body was in a prison, his soul was as in a palace. And even externally, he was soon to have such attendance there as the dwellers in royal and imperial mansions have not.

There was the most formal precaution on the part of the tyrant, to secure his intended victim. “*He put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers,*” (four times four) who took their stations, in arms and military pride; but perhaps wondering that so many were thought necessary for such a service. And, indeed, they were

either too many or too few. Peter had a number of affectionate, humble, pious friends, but peaceful, unarmed, oppressed, and malignantly watched ; for any danger of an insurrection and rescue by them, these guards were pompously *too many* ; but if considered as appointed to resist and overpower *whatever* might come to the prisoner's aid, they were *too few*. There was a recorded instance of an army besetting the dwelling-place of a prophet, and being baffled. There was another example to show that had they, instead of sixteen, been 185,000, they might still be too few. If Herod could have had there even the mighty aggregate of the Roman legions, they would have been too few.

No intercession for Peter with the king appears to have been ventured or thought of. But something else was done,—“*prayer was made without ceasing to God for him ;*” an expedient which would have been held in great contempt by Herod and his men of war, and by the people too. But they who had recourse to it, knew well what they were about. How happy that in all extremities, and when every other expedient is precluded or unavailing, the greatest of all still remains !

Good men are to remember one another in their prayers ; especially when any of them are placed in situations of very difficult duty or great peril. And peculiarly when any are involved in fearful danger in consequence of their being faithfully devoted to God and religion. (Certain missionaries in the East at this time.) In times of persecution this affectionate, sympathetic piety has been warmed and exalted to a

degree of which *we* can hardly form any conception. And in not a few instances, there have been remarkable interpositions apparently in consequence of, plainly in connection with, this intercessory devotion.

But Peter's friends and himself had to wait ; for days and nights passed on, and nothing unusual occurred. At length the appointed day was just arriving, only one night between, if indeed that night itself was not to have been the time. He had probably no doubt as to his destination ; and he might, or might not, be apprised that the appointed time was so immediately at hand. But, at all events, he was in great tranquillity,—*slept*, between two soldiers, and in his chains. He felt no restless agitation ;—cast no desponding looks at the bars, the fetters, the walls, the guards ;—indulged in no desperate imaginations or vain implorings. A man with a good conscience, and wholly resigned to God, may sleep anywhere. Why not ? if he has attained the point to be “indifferent in his choice to sleep or die.” In some instances, devout faith has risen so high that the man in peril has been enabled to feel as if the question of his life and death was more God's concern than his own. “If God wants my life for further service, he will preserve it ; if *he* does not want it, *I* do not.”

See, now, this man, within the relentless hold of these walls, these irons, these savage and faithful guards—these three strong gates,—under the doom of an inexorable tyrant, who was delighted in anticipating the delight he meant to give to the barbarous multitude. The Christians were both

powerless and in quiet resignation ; with no means even of making interest with "*the king's chamberlain.*" Within an hour or two, can this man be walking, perfectly free ? How would such a question have sounded to Herod and any of his favourites and idolaters ?

"*The angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison.*" How different is such a being, in such a place, from a man ! He cares not for a massive structure, if it were built of piled rocks,—cares not for securities of iron,—for guards, for gates. He can pass in and out when he pleases,—can rend, can demolish,—can take away the imprisoned mortal whom he is sent to visit. And he is sure to find whom he is sent to visit. There is no dark recess, no secret dungeon, which his presence will not instantaneously flash into. Let but the commission be given him, and he will infallibly be at the spot where it is to be executed. His entrance to Peter was with no tumult, and ostentation of power. It was so calm and silent, that he did not awake. The angel "*smote him on the side,*" and summoned him to rise. But it was a gentle violence. Not so he, or some of his celestial associates, had smitten the furious assailants of Lot—not so the army of Sennacherib—not so he smote Herod. A gentle violence ! Methinks an emblem of the death of a Christian ; a soft blow to emancipate him from the prison of mortality,—to summon and raise him to eternal liberty, to the amplitude of heaven !

Peter awaked to gaze on the angelic visitant and disturber. It was worth the sleep of death so to

awake. And a good man, sinking in that sleep, does, in his soul, so awake. His agency struck the chains from Peter's hands, as an intensely powerful stroke of lightning might ; but *that* would have been destruction to the man so set free ; here it was by an innocent and silent force. No time was given for wonder, or questions, or idle triumph, at the amazement and terror of the impotent guards. We, however, feel somewhat of that triumph in viewing the scene. We seem to challenge—"Who will attempt to arrest him, or touch him now ? What hard, ferocious, martial countenance, will dare even to frown upon him, as he goes out, led by an angel's hand ?"

Each expression and movement was that of haste. This character of speed, and prompt execution, attaches to many, to most, of the recorded interventions of these superhuman agents. As if even *they*, that never slumber, and live for ever, *had no time to lose*,—had other things demanding their instant activity,—and could not stay as if to enjoy the complacency of what they had done ;—are not detained by any delighted wonder that they should have been able to do it.

Peter did as he was commanded,—but was so amazed that he thought it was all "*a vision*." What an infinite series of things, God can, if he will, throughout all eternity, display, successively, to his intelligent creatures, that will so astonish them that it will require time to recover their faculties to apprehend as reality ; and which will fill them with delight as soon as they can stedfastly apprehend them. Paul, in his rapture to the third heaven, had

not time for this full recovery, for he could never tell, whether he had then been "*in the body*," or "*out of it*."

The outermost great "*iron gate*" opened of "*its own accord*," to illustrate the power of spirit over matter, especially when that spirit is not grossly involved in matter. And, doubtless, a larger measure of this commanding power will be conferred on the human spirits that are in the divine favour, in that higher state where they shall no longer be loaded with their vehicle of clay. In this splendid manner was Peter led out of prison. How different from that in which he had been brought in! grasped as a criminal,—loaded with fetters,—attended by guards who despised their charge,—insulted, probably, by the populace! How different, too, from that in which the tyrant had intended he should be led out!—That tyrant might take, or not, as he pleased, this one more lesson and proof, that there is in action on earth, a will and a power above all human might and pride. To the humble Christians it would be an animating manifestation in whose hands they were.

The angel left Peter, having accomplished his appointment. But there was to be another time when Peter would want the visit of such a messenger. And there will be a time when *we* also shall want it;—when we shall have to go out from the prison-house of mortality,—and from the world itself. And let us seriously think, what previous course, what habits, what spirit prevailing through our life will be likely to terminate in our finding such a messenger appointed to be with us at that hour,—appointed to

be with us, and *not* to leave us,—to accompany us in an immense and amazing journey ; that whereas Peter came to be delighted by, and collectedly sensible of, the grand intervention when he found himself alone in the street, *we* may become sensible of the wondrous reality of it, by finding ourselves in the presence of saints and angels, and their supreme Lord !

1825.

LECTURE XIX.

THE CONSIDERATION OF DEATH.

DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 29.

“ O that they would consider their latter end.”

LATELY, in a social hour, I heard it proposed as a question, curious as well as serious,—to account for the general insensibility of men to the grand fact that they are mortal ;—this being universally known to be an infallible certainty, how does it happen that most men habitually think of it very little, and are very little affected by it ?

We might employ a few moments beneficially in, first, taking account of the fact itself (of this insensibility;) next, seeing what can be brought in explanation ; and last, briefly remonstrating against this insensibility.

That there is, very generally, a strange want of reflection and concern respecting our condition as mortal is most apparent, in many plain familiar proofs. Perhaps nothing in the world, that appears so out of consistency, is so obvious. The fact of a whole race dead, from the beginning of time to the present generation, comes with but little impression on us,

except at occasional moments. In surveying history, it is with the men of past ages, *as living*, that our thoughts are busy. The thought that they are all dead, and that this fact tells us what we also shall be, may not occur through many chapters. But there is no need of illustrations of such wide reference. The insensibility may be shown in more familiar exemplifications. Persons inhabiting a house of considerable age—how often are they reminded that persons formerly occupying its apartments, treading its avenues, are dead, with a pointed application of this thought to themselves? And so of places of worship, and of other resort. But there is still more immediate evidence. How little effect, in the way of reflection on ourselves, appears to be produced by the instances and spectacles of actual mortality; by the termination of a life in our near neighbourhood, or among those whom we well knew! Persons frequently and officially conversant with circumstances of death are often very remarkably estranged from reflection upon it, as applied to themselves. And so are a large proportion of those who are drawn as spectators of a funeral procession, or an interment;—how many, in the silence of serious thought, say, “that is the situation that I shall be in, ere long!” And let even persons not of the thoughtless tribe, confess how their minds have been affected, at the removal of a neighbour or acquaintance, or at the last office performed to the departed. Can they say, they felt their minds powerfully arrested by the event or the immediate spectacle? that solemn thoughts poured in upon them, freely and fast, precluding for a while all

trifling ones? that their living principle was turned as it were into sympathy with death? that involuntarily they were realizing to themselves, with profound emotion, their own cessation of life, consignment to the dust, and entrance on a world unseen? Will they not, on the contrary, confess that it has required a great effort to attain the solemnity of reflection;—that they had to strive with their minds to fix their thoughts;—that there was a great inaptitude to make the case their own? Have they not wondered that the admonition of their own mortality was not more emphatic, and that they could so very soon recover the customary tenor of feeling? May we not add, as a general fact, the very small effect of the memory of the departed, in the way of admonition of our own mortality? There may be many recollections of what they were, and what they did, and of our intercourse with them, and yet few impressive reflections turning on ourselves as to follow them. There is a sort of quiet sentiment to this effect—“that they had completed their appointed time, and *their* time was not *ours*,”—and there it ends. We are independent of their destiny,—are companions for the living,—have the business of life to prosecute,—and so we are little disturbed by the united warning call of many departed.

Consider again,—how little and seldom we are struck with the reflection, how many things we are exposed to that might cause death! what little things might be fatal! how many instances we hear of! how possible to befall us! how marvellous that we are preserved! But we go forward just as if none of

these smaller poisoned arrows of death were flying, or of the greater darts either. None of them have struck us, and therefore we live in a thoughtless presumption of impunity indefinitely.

Observe, too, how soon a recovery from danger sets aside the serious thought of death. Suppose a narrow and providential escape from a sudden peril of violent death ; what is the course of feeling subsequently ? Or the gradual recovery from illness that very seriously threatened to be fatal. We had most impressive thoughts of death then. But there is a favourable turn,—small but sensible amendment,—it gradually advances,—and in the same proportion the solemn idea of death recedes, diminishes. The frowning spectre fades into a mist at the dawning of the day. So that even before the complete recovery to health all the strong serious impressiveness of the thought of death is gone. In some instances, the very remembrance that it *was* impressive and alarming, seems to have vanished.

Observe again ;—how schemes are formed for a long future time, with as much interest, and as much anticipating confidence, as if there were no such thing in the world as death. One has looked at the mortal, and listened to him, while he has been calculating, that in five years, or in ten, the progress would reach such a point ; in five or ten more it would be completed, in such and such a result ; confidently calculating on his life to continue and flourish through all this progress.

We see, on all hands, how business, pleasure, and even sin, are prosecuted with an earnestness and

systematic pertinacity, not in the least degree checked or mitigated by any thought of death ; hardly checked, even when associates or rivals are seized and carried away ! Even the old age of a person, previously thoughtless, seems not necessarily to bring any serious reflections on this subject. Looking at mankind generally, do you not think, that a very large part of the time of most of them passes wholly clear from any monitory interference of the thought of their mortality ? There even are some on whom the very thought itself, does not probably once intrude in long spaces of time—during many weeks or months. Look at those living beings that have (as we suppose, and perhaps they would affirm it, if they were questioned) *souls*, actuating those bodies ! Think of them as knowing themselves infallibly appointed to die, and yet advancing toward that event in the miraculous fatuity of never being disturbed by any thought of the subject ! Look at another large proportion, who do sometimes advert to this their solemn destiny, with a temporary feeling of seriousness or sadness ; but will not dwell upon it ; and do not seek to have the habit of their souls, and their plan of life, ordered to a consistency with it. And last, there is the much smaller class of persons who do seriously desire and aim at this,—and *they* have to reproach themselves often and bitterly, that they are not under a more powerful and abiding influence of this great prospect.

Now all this appears very strange — and that should mean—that it is not easy to comprehend how and why it should be so. In making a few suggestions,

in the way of accounting for it, we might say, First, that our Creator would in wisdom insert in the human mind a principle counteractive, in some degree, to the influence of this prospect of death,—in such a degree, that it should not have the utmost possible influence which it might seem adapted to have. For it would seem, that so grand and awful a fact, in prospect, with the uncertainty how soon it may be realized, might operate with an influence indefinite, unlimited, and altogether overpowering. To be under the appointment to have, not very long hence, the very constitution of our being dissolved,—the only visible, palpable part of it, turned to dust,—to be taken out, in an instant, by one act of irresistible power, from all connexion with this world,—to be transferred to another scene of existence, and under circumstances inconceivably solemn,—it would seem that the *entire*, appropriate influence of such a prospect might arrest and suppress the whole active economy of this world. Now God would certainly place, in our constitution, a principle to limit this influence, so that it should not be inconsistent with our state in this life. But then how vastly short would that partial, measured counteraction be, of the actual counteraction which does repel and throw off so nearly the whole salutary influence of the prospect of death! The difference between these two is the reproach, the madness, and the ruin of our race.

And, when it is asked, “And how comes this to be?” the general explanation is that which accounts for everything that is wrong, namely, the fearful, *radical depravity of our nature*. And

are there any that recoil at this often repeated phrase and doctrine? Let them collect their sense to look at the case in question,—a world of beings living all under the doom of such a thing as death is, and most of them taking no thought or care about it!

But to assign this general cause does not suffice to the inquiry. There doubtless are special causes, through which that great general one operates, availing itself of them. One of these may be, *the perfect distinctness of life and death*. They do not partially co-exist, in the individual, like imperfect health with a degree of illness. We have life absolutely, and death not at all; so that we can make no experimental comparison between them; we cannot know, by means of the one, what the other is. It is only by the entire giving up of life, that we can really know anything of death. And, therefore, it is an object solely of belief, and not of any possible mode of immediate apprehension. Besides, death is a single act or event, and therefore cannot be compared with a state.

Again; we think that even the *certainty* and the *universality* of death, may be numbered among the causes tending to withdraw men's thoughts from it. Consider, that an important matter, hanging in doubt, has great power of excitement from that very cause. The question, "Will it be or not? how will the event decide?" keeps the feelings of the soul in agitation,—raises alternate hope and fear,—produces a wakeful, anxious, expecting state of mind; in all this, the thoughts are irresistibly drawn to the object.

But when there remains no doubt how the event is to be, all this subsides. And even though the decision be the worst that was feared, the evil accomplished or expected may really be less thought of, than while there appeared a possibility of avoiding or averting it. The mind sinks into a kind of dull fatalism. The *certainty* of death precludes all this excitement.

And then the *universality*. This takes away all inquisitive wondering who may, and who may not, (and why the difference?) be appointed to the fate. It prevents, too, all invidious comparison, with the elation on the one side, and mortification on the other. It leaves no place for envy, jealousy, or competition; no matter even for comparison. Now, that which is of a nature to excite and keep in activity these passions is certain to be an object of great attention and interest, and *vice versâ*. Death has no hold on a large proportion of those feelings by which the human mind is kept in a state of attention and interest toward an object. No man, in a company, can say within himself, which of us shall be alive ages after the others of us shall be reduced to dust. No one has against his enemy the hope that he may die, but himself may live. There is no sense of inequality, stimulated to intense interest by wondering and wishing it could but be known where the advantage lies. No one's death, when it takes place, is the practical answer to any curiosity respecting *whether* he was to die.

We might specify another thing as one of the causes sought for; that is, the utter inability to form any

defined idea of the manner of existence after death. The thoughts sent onward to that boundary of life, cannot stop there ; the mere termination itself is nothing ; they look beyond ; but beyond is thickest darkness, as often as they go there ; so that there is, as it were, nothing shown to draw the mind thither to look over the limit. And it is not in the disposition of the mind to look in the direction of that which it can form no definite idea of. We do not prolong our look on absolute darkness ; especially while the mind has, close around it, a crowd of things of which it has a distinct and vivid idea, with great interest of its passions concerning them. There may be added to this, our having no communications with the persons who have passed through death.

But, after all, the chief causes that there is so little thought and concern on this great subject, are of a much more obvious kind, and involving guilt.

One is a general presumption of having long to live. In each stage of life, still this beguiled confidence is indulged. In imagination the prospect stretches away into indefinite remoteness. Death must be somewhere yonder, it is acknowledged, but far beyond the sensible horizon ; and it is willingly left shrouded in the mists and clouds. Some period long hence will be the proper time to think of it ; but there is ample space of privilege and exemption between. This presumed wide space diminishes the greatness and importance of the object ; and thus diminished to insignificance, it has no power to com-

pel men's thoughts or serious cares. This pernicious presumption of long life is indulged, in spite of all evidence of life's uncertainty, and of its actual brevity, in a very great proportion of instances. It would be a striking disclosure, if we could know the amount of the difference between the average measure of time that the people now alive will actually live, and that measure which would be the collective amount of what they presume on living.

Another great cause of the thoughtlessness and insensibility, (indeed it is both cause and effect,) is that men occupy their whole soul and life with things to preclude the thought of its end. They mingle their whole living with the world's elements, so that their spiritual nature is lost, and cannot, in this gross compound, be come at,—cannot be touched or found by any solemn subject applied. They have, thus, a disastrous protection against the thought of death, amidst employments, projects, amusements, society, news, and all that the world is crowded with. In conjunction and co-operation with this cause, there is an aversion to dwell in contemplation on those things to which death leads; for example, eternity,—the appearance before the Divine Majesty,—the great award,—the entrance on a state of retribution. We may add to these causes, an inadequate, contracted notion of what is necessary as a preparation for the event.

And to give full force to all these causes, there is, in a large proportion of men, a formal, systematic endeavour to keep off the thought of death. How

striking if it could be known in how many instances, within one week, in this great city, this effort has been made, and with success! A strong action to turn the thoughts in another direction,—an amusing book seized,—or a hasty recourse to occupation,—or an excursion,—or a going into a gay circle,—possibly a plunge into intemperance. And all the unfortunate things that may have befallen, have not been a measure of calamity equal to that involved in the *success* of this endeavour!

Such are the causes in operation to keep men from considering their latter end. We have hardly a moment left for the topics of admonition and remonstrance against indulging such a habit of the soul. But let it be impressed upon us, that to end our life is the mightiest event that awaits us in this world. And it is that which we are living but to come to. It holds out a grand protest against being absorbed and lost in this world. It is the termination of a period confessedly introductory and probationary. Without thinking of it, often and with deep interest, there is no possibility that our scheme and course of life should be directed to the supreme purpose of life. To have been thoughtless of it, then, will ultimately be an immense calamity; it will be to be in a state unprepared for it. The settled indisposition, therefore, to think of it should smite us with the conviction of something greatly and ominously wrong. If it be fear that deters, consider whether prolonged estrangement from the subject will remove or lessen the just causes for that fear. And consider, that there is a sovereign antidote against the fear of

death. There is ONE that has himself yielded to death, in order to vanquish it for us, and take its terrors away. The Son of God took on him our mortal nature, "*that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were, all their life-time, in bondage.*"

LECTURE XX.

THE APOSTOLIC ALTERNATIVE.

PHILIPPIANS i. 21.

“ To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

ONE has often wished it were possible to know exactly what kind of sentiment is excited in the minds of persons of various orders, at hearing pronounced some very remarkable sentence of scripture. It is, indeed, but too probable, that in many there may be no distinct excitement of feeling or reflection at all. But we would not willingly suppose this in the case of hearing so eminently remarkable a declaration as this of the apostle,—so adapted to turn every mind to a reflection on itself. Here we have the apostle deliberately taking account, in reference to himself, of two things, of the deepest interest to every man,—forming a comparative estimate of life and death, as to the preferableness to him, of the one or the other. And we can give him full credit when he avows which of them is in itself, preferable in his esteem and desire.

Now we may presume that most persons have their comparative estimate of these two things.

They have it in settled feeling, if not in deliberate thought. And with the generality of men, how does that estimate stand? At the very first view of the matter, we have an unfavourable light thrown on it by the evident fact, that men generally have a horror of death. This indeed we must, in part, set to the account of a mere natural feeling, which the Creator himself has intentionally made instinctive in our constitution. Insomuch, that if we might suppose a man exercising, for a while, a judgment perfectly cool and abstracted from all passions, and in that judgment deciding that the two things were just equally desirable, no preference due to either, the instinctive feeling would vigorously rise up in preference of life. But this is a vain supposition. Men do not feel any such equality of estimate on life and death as to leave it to the mere instinctive feeling to decide the preference.

Consider a moment in what comparative view men do regard these two things. In what manner would they (adopting a form of expression in imitation of that of the apostle) declare or confess how they account of the two? Looking at them in their various characters, you can seem to hear what they would say,—one, and another, “*To me to live is—to die is*”—what? Let them respectively tell what.

“‘*To me to live*’ (might one say) is—gaiety, vivacity, amusement, delightful society, spirited pursuit, animated sublunary hope. ‘*To die*’ would be the quenching of all this joy,—to be torn from the only felicity that I know,—to be flung from this present world,—to plunge as into a dark gulf,—to

go I know not where, and where I do not wish to go."

"*'To me to live'* (might another say) is—the utmost indulgence of all the luxury of the senses, passions, appetites,—a revel in the abundance of gratifications,—a variety and change of delights,—a full life in the present moment—and *'to-morrow to be as this day and still more abundant.'* *'To die'* would be the destruction of all these senses, and all that gratifies them,—to go where all must to me be famine and desolation,—to go where, if that religion be true, I should be tormented in the spirit for having lived wholly to the flesh."

"*'To me to live'* (might another say) is—affluence in what all are coveting—the proud sense of how much I can call my own,—the means of commanding around me the thousand things I may wish for, and the deference of mankind into the account,—to have my mansion, my domain, my obsequious dependants. *'To die,'* would be, to have all this seized by others,—to be consigned to a few feet of earth—and for the living, conscious principle to deplore in vain that all is lost."

"*'To me to live'* (might another say) is—a vigorous prosecution of my favourite worldly purposes—successful enterprise—competition overcome,—prosperity attained with rapidly advancing progress—power, perhaps,—and fame."

"*'To die'*—that would be to lose the field of my career—my world,—and what should I have to do or pursue *then?* There is no other region for which my powers have been trained, or where I know of

anything on which I could desire to exert them. In the other world I must appear as a stranger to all that are said to be the happy employments there."

But we might advert to a very different condition of life, in which it appears divested of these interests and captivations.

"*'To me to live'* is—a hard and difficult thing. It is—to endure deprivation, poverty, pain, and disease, and many troubles." "Well then," we say, "would you *'die'* in preference?" How often the answer would be "Oh, no, no ;—not *die!* *that* would be a still worse thing than all this." If we ask, "Why so? how so?" sometimes the person can hardly tell. There is a general undefined horror of death; but sometimes there is the power of conscience in the case.

And if next we turn our view to the case of men decidedly and grossly wicked, who yet are not able to shake off the belief in a future judgment and retribution, we see the same effect from the interference of conscience.

"*'To me to live'* is indeed a course in which my pleasures are sadly poisoned with vexation,—but at any rate it is, for so long, an exemption from what I have to expect hereafter. Besides, while I live, it is possible I may repent and reform. But to me—*'To die'* is perdition!"

If our attention were directed to an Atheist, whether of the coarser class, or a philosophic speculative one—still we should find the same mighty preference of life to death,—and most justly!

“ ‘*To me to live*’ is—to have the play of all my senses and faculties,—to take all I dare or can, of immediate good,—to exult in defiance of what superstition has feigned an Almighty Power,—perhaps to command great attention by my genius and philosophizings. On the contrary, ‘*To die*,’ is to have all this broken up and vanished—consciousness extinct—to become a clod of earth! Why, I could wish that I had never existed, as then I had not been haunted by a sense of this doom to become nothing ;—not to mention my occasional fears that there may be something infinitely worse.”

We will but add to these exemplifications the case of those who should entertain the notion of a temporary extinction, annihilation, of the soul—the conscious intelligent principle,—to be in existence again after the resurrection.

“ ‘*To me to live*,’ may be—to be warmed and actuated by many pleasing, and many sublime interests,—all the social benevolent affections,—augmenting knowledge—high contemplation,—service to God—various utility.

“ ‘*To die*’ must be the perfect cessation of all this,—the absolute negation of all good ; and that, too, while this good is actually in possession of many of my human brethren ;—and while I might, possibly, have continued in possession of it many years longer. And this negation to be for an indefinitely long time, perhaps thousands of years, during which an amazing train of wonders will take place, and of good enjoyed. ‘*To me to die*,’ therefore, would plainly be a great loss. And a poor consolation, in expecting it, that

I shall myself be so lost as not to be sensible of any loss."

As to the notion itself, with so many scriptures in direct contradiction to it, we need not dwell on its absurdity. The temporary 'extinction—annihilation of the conscious principle, or soul! As if a soul annihilated *could* ever exist again. Reduce the soul to non-existence, and can anything under heaven be clearer than that whatever soul or spirit shall afterwards be made to exist, must be absolutely a creation, a new being altogether, just as much as Adam was? If it be said that the Almighty can impress on that new spirit, a sense of its having existed before, and a conscience of having been good or evil,—the answer is, we cannot presume to say, that that is impossible to his power, but it would be most flagrant fallacy in all the creation; and, on the ground of justice, a thing horrid to think of, in the case of such a soul doomed to punishment.

But we return to the apostle, and in his alternative see a happy contrast to all we have been describing. "*To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*"

And doubtless it is also the state of every true and faithful disciple of Christ, though he may not always have the full consolatory sense and assurance of it; nor habitually have the same decided preference of death.

"*To me to live is Christ.*" A bold figure,—showing for one thing, the rapid action of his mind,—a haste to express the main idea; an impatience, as it were, of the intermediate and explanatory expressions.

For another thing,—it shows the mighty magni-

tude of that object in his esteem. He regarded all the grand truths and interests of religion as centring in *Him*—comprehended in *Him*; insomuch that his very name might stand equivalent to them all. How absurd, if he were not infinitely higher, greater, than a man, a prophet! Think how it would have sounded if, for instance, Elijah, the zealous and heroic advocate of the Old Testament law, when he, at one time, desired to “*die rather than live*,” had recovered to the consideration of his important mission and said, “No; I am willing for my great work’s sake, to live a while longer,—for, *to me to live is Moses*.”

“*To me to live is Christ*.” His chief and immediate reference was to the important service which his prolonged life and apostleship would render to the Christian cause, and especially to the Christian converts to whom he was writing. Humanly speaking, a few years more of his life might (and in fact did) contribute greatly to the extension and confirmation of the true religion. (Apply this, in its inferior measure, to Christians *now*.) But his thoughts would not turn solely on the benefit he would so impart to others, in the promotion of the cause. He would include,—the happiness which he would, the while, enjoy himself;—the admiring and grateful contemplation of the economy of redemption;—meditation on the personal excellence, and glory, and sublimity of the Messiah, the Son of God;—an employment of thought on each of the distinct, or distinguishable parts, and truths, of the new religion;—the sense of his own happy interest in this system of redemption;—the experience of its

progressive efficacy on his mind and his course of action ;—that communion with Christ to which he and all the apostles so often refer with great emphasis of delight ;—the hope, the assured prospect of all that was in futurity, for himself, and for the world. All this he had, as a devoted servant of Christ ; and this he would continue to have in living longer. And what value may we suppose he set upon it ? What, in all the world, would he have exchanged it for, even for the space of one month ? Supposing him (as we may) naturally of an ambitious character, would he have exchanged it for to have been at the head of the Roman empire ? Suppose him (as we may) of a character to covet the heights and depths of philosophy, and the splendour of eloquence ; for all that Athens boasted of these, would he have consented to a temporary exchange ? Something incomparably better and nobler in his esteem than all this he had, and was sure he should continue to have, in every portion of his prolonged life. And yet if he had been permitted to make a choice, simply for his own happiness, he would most gladly have surrendered all this for what he should gain by death ! He had to exercise a self-denial, a suppression of his wishes, in submission to his Master's determination (doubtless signified to him by inspiration), that his life should be protracted. With this concentration of animating interests in his soul,—the happiest man, very probably, on the whole face of the earth,—he, nevertheless, deliberately judged that “*to depart and be with Christ,*” would, as to himself, “*be far better.*” The loss of all this on earth

would be his "*gain*." And WHEN "*his gain?*" WHEN "*better?*" In the name of common sense, what can the expressions mean but that to be in the state of "*the dead in Christ*," of those who "*slept in Jesus*," would be better *during that very same time* that, otherwise, he would, by his Master's appointment, be living in his service and enjoying all his benedictions? during those very same months and years that it was signified to him that he must submit to remain among the living? What! to be in that space of time in the state, or rather no-state, of annihilation, (as to all sense and enjoyment,)—was that accounted by him to be "*better*" than such a state of feeling and action as he was in! Truly, a most marvellous encomium of his Master's service,—his Master's beneficence,—his Master's communion! Splendid celebration of the happiness of having the smile of Omnipotence,—revelations of divine truth—the power of working miracles—and of promoting the highest, the eternal interests of mankind,—and that in a way which was to operate to the end of time!

How wise the judgment, too, on another ground,—supposing this fall into insensibility and mental annihilation, from death to the resurrection. At that solemn period the apostle knew there would be conferred a felicity, often called by him a reward, proportioned to the service rendered on earth to Him who will then be the judge. Therefore every addition here made to that service will then and there be an augmentation of the reward. And did ever mortal set a more magnificent value in anticipation on that final reward? None ever.

Well, then, was it possible that this heroic apostle, ambitious in the noblest sense, could deliberately say, "Let me be in a state of practical annihilation during that space of time in which I might, instead, be rendering to my Lord those continued services which would lead to an inconceivable augmentation of my glory when he shall come?" No! rather, if such a thing might have been permitted, he would have prayed that by a miracle his life might be protracted for centuries longer—"Why is not our life that of Methuselah?" We said—"could he deliberately so decide?" for observe, the apostle's expression of preferring to die, was not uttered in a crisis of despondency, like that of Elijah, when he felt as in a desperate extremity, and all seemed to be lost as to the good cause; but evidently in a state of the calmest thought, and when he saw that he was successful in his important mission, and should continue to be so in living to prosecute it. In this state of mind he still said, to leave all this, and "*to be with Christ, is far better,*"—"to die is gain." Every honest reader feels that he means—"better to be with Christ, sensibly so, during the very same time that otherwise I might be living and serving him on earth." To be "*absent from the body,*" was, according to his faith, to "*be present with the Lord.*"

The apostle was of the highest order of Christians. But to every real Christian, "*to die is gain.*" This needs not any extended illustration. The sensible loss of all the evils of their present state, will itself be an immense "*gain.*" To have escaped out of all the evils belonging to the bodily existence—weakness,

pains, sickness, anxious care, imprisonment of the soul ;—all sorrows of the mind, and all their causes. The being, if we may express it so, *on the immortal side of death* ;—pre-eminently, the perfect deliverance from sin,—every propensity of the animated, active, energetic spirit, pointing only to good,—pure, absolute, unmingled good,—so that an unlimited liberty may be given to all its tendencies—the attainment of immense knowledge, of the most delightful kind ;—all of it, *here*, beyond the utmost reach of thought ;—the society of happy spirits of the human order—and of the angelic ;—some far more bright and direct manifestation of the Divine Being and of the Mediator ;—an intense realization of what has been done and obtained for them by the redeeming mediation ;—the joyful and impatient looking forward to what is to be revealed and conferred at the resurrection.

How mighty the duty, how transcendent the interest, of directing our utmost energy to the object that death may be “*gain* !”

LECTURE XXI.

BENEFICIAL CO-OPERATION OF ALL THINGS FOR THE
CHRISTIAN.

ROMANS viii. 28.

“ We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

AT several of our former meetings, occasion was taken to describe the gloomy, disastrous, and mysterious condition of the world and the times,—to make some reflections on the evident and awful prevalence of evil,—and to advert to the hopes and promises of a happier age to come.

But as our lot is cast upon the present time, and in the midst of so dark a dispensation, it is very desirable to keep in sight whatever considerations are most adapted to impart consolation, and inspire devout gratitude, even in beholding the state of things as they are. In a gloomy winter of the north, while the sun is nearly absent, and a dreary scene stretches round on all sides, so much more need and value is there of the cheerful fire and the constant burning lamp. And such a warmth and light are given by the truth declared in our text.

“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

But, perhaps, the first idea suggested by such a declaration may be,—what a different thing this world is, to the two different classes of its inhabitants, according to the different state of their minds,—to those “*that love God*,” and those who do not—his friends and his enemies! As simple matters of fact, the circumstances of the world are much alike, or the very same, to both. The general order of nature and providence,—the aspects and influences of the earth and heavens,—the vicissitudes of the seasons, with their severities and bounties,—the sustenance and protection of life,—are the same to both. Both are fed and clothed,—sleep and awake,—dwell and travel. To both is the same mingled distribution of health and sickness, accidents and misfortunes. They both share in great public benefits and calamities,—in the effects of a wise and beneficent government, or of an insane and barbarous tyranny,—in prosperity and peace, or the devastations perpetrated by war,—and if there be pestilences, famines, earthquakes, or fires. In this more favoured part of the world, the divine revelation shines on both classes alike,—the Redeemer, the Son of God, is manifested before them, with all the grace, the blessings, the promises, the prospective glories of his gospel. Does not all this appear a very comprehensive likeness in the condition of men? And this fact, of the likeness or sameness in so many circumstances, in the human condition, both to the good

and the evil, would be a most mysterious thing, without a light cast upon it from heaven. And this was forcibly and painfully felt by thoughtful men, even under the light, but the mere glimmering light, of the earlier revelation, as by the Psalmist and the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes.

To us is granted a light that pierces deeper through this sameness on the surface of things. And then, what an immense difference! The most striking of all kinds of unlikeness is that, where the effects are immeasurably different, while the things themselves are the same. Behold, then, this economy of the same things constituting the portion in this world, of both the good and the evil! View it as in the effects of these things upon the two classes respectively. The good things (good in themselves,) in the condition of man on earth,—what do they do for evil men, the enemies of God? and the evil things, what? What to *them* is the effect of all nature, with its beauties, its grandeurs, its vicissitudes, its productions? What, to *them*, the bounties of providence, the support and protection, the health, the pleasures, the wealth? Or what, to *them*, the contrary part of their experience,—the privations, the disappointments, the sickness, the share of general calamities? What are all these *in effect*, to men who continue still irreligious, thoughtless, unthankful, unhumbled, unholy enemies of God—rendering no service to him,—making no spiritual improvement, no preparation for the eternal state, but frustrating all the discipline of heaven?

Now, where can terms be found to express the

measure of the difference between such a condition, and that which is asserted of "*them that love God?*" And think, what a force of contrast is thrown on these two opposite states of a human soul, by this single consideration,—that the one is so disposed as to derive no essential benefit from the entire order and total of things,—the other is so disposed, that all things operate towards it beneficially. Is it possible to conceive any representation that should, in all reason, strike with a more awakening impression, or a stronger incitement? To sojourn in this world of crowded objects and incidents, with an experience of its vast variety of pleasing and painful things, and in a state of mind which repels all the most precious good that they might impart! Or, in a state which draws and receives into the soul, from all the diversity of things, a pure, ethereal emanation, a vital spirit, augmenting the inner life, refining, invigorating, and elevating the soul, to a readiness to fly off into eternity!

And that one state of the soul should thus *repel* the essential, spiritual good of all things, and that an opposite one should *attract* it—is not strange, if we consider what principle it is that is present or absent there—*the love of God*. *That* being wanting, how should the soul derive the good of things? The perception, the discriminating faculty, is wanting;—the transmuting power is wanting;—the principle to repel the evil, is wanting;—nay, the very will to obtain the good, is wanting. The happy adaptation belongs only to "*them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose.*"

The latter part of the sentence explains how they come to love God,—“*not that they first loved him, but that he loved them.*” They were the objects of his gracious “*purpose.*” “*Predestinated,*” (says the apostle in another place) “*according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*” Again, “*according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Again, “*who hath called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*” And so the verse following the text proceeds, in continuation and explanation of it, “*whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate, them he also called,*” &c. No one that knows anything aright of the dreadfully alienated state of our nature, can for a moment believe that a condition of the soul in which the love of God should prevail, can be produced, created, by any less cause than the sovereign operation of the Divine Spirit; in other words, by an effectual “*calling.*” But, then, neither can he imagine, that this effectual operation, this supernatural “*calling,*” should be an undetermined action, as if from a sudden, and, as it were, incidental thought of the Almighty. “*Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world.*”

This, then, is the sacred train and process; the ancient, unalterable intention, or “*purpose,*” fulfilled at length in “*the calling according to that purpose;*” and this “*calling*” being an inspiration of “*the love of God*” into the renewed soul. And this places the soul in a new system of relations with the world and

its events, and *that*, the most advantageous one that is possible. It is, essentially, a reversal of the former, and merely natural, state of relations with the world, (that is, as to the spiritual effect.) Not that we can be so thoughtless, as to represent it as being an entire reversal. No ; unhappily, those who experience it in the greatest degree have to deplore a sad remainder of the old natural relation to the world,—of that state on which things and events do not operate beneficially. But the indwelling of the love of God constitutes a *radical* change, so that “*the working together*” of things upon the mind, shall be, mainly and predominantly, “*for good ;*” and progressively more so, in proportion as that sacred principle more fully prevails.

We observed, that, in the absence of this divine principle, the soul is naturally incapable, unqualified, to receive the essential good from all things. On the contrary,—that principle prevailing within it creates (shall we say ?) a natural adaptation to derive the good. Not in any manner independently of the continual operation of the Spirit of God ; but at the same time, that Divine Spirit, in having imparted this heavenly principle, and in maintaining it in the soul, has given it a state, or constitution, naturally adapted to derive good from all things. For consider ; the love of God, as far as it prevails in the soul, makes it quick to perceive, to dislike, and to repel, all that is evil ; makes it solicitous, vigilant, and active, to apprehend and obtain all the most essential good. The love of God will naturally connect the thought of Him with “*all things.*” The love of God counter-

works the internal corruptions and evil passions which render the soul subject to the noxious influence of things. The love of God moves the soul to have continual recourse to him. Thus the love of God, by its natural tendency, is adapted, and adapts, the soul to secure the noble advantage named in our text.

But, then, beyond all this, the supreme security is, that God will have it so. He will make "*all things work for good to them that love him.*" They are the most valued objects he has in the world ; and it may well be believed that *theirs* shall not be suffered to be a secondary interest, sacrificed to any other,—that they shall not be left to chances and hazards for their welfare. For their sake, he has willed and has given something incomparably more valuable than all things here, even his beloved Son, who is constituted "*to the church, head over all things.*" And this cannot be less than a security that "*all things*" shall be made to minister to them, in conformity to the purpose of that supreme gift for their welfare. His grand intention, in this chief thing, he will not suffer any other things effectually to counteract. But the same exertion of power that can prevent their doing so, can also make them co-operate for his people. And the declaration is, that they do "*work together for good.*"

But, then, is it not very striking to consider what a system there is going on, of which the men of the world, the strangers and enemies to God, are very little aware ? They think not that the world itself, with all its large economy, is maintained chiefly on account of "*them that love God.*" They little consider, that this mingled scene is serving the purpose of a

place of discipline, a great school, a field, for training, exercising, improving, maturing, a select and peculiar race, in preparation for another world. It is but very indistinctly apparent to them, how the multitude of things, and the course of events, of whatever kind, are put under a sovereign requisition to contribute service, and invaluable profit to the peculiar people ; —how the great arrangements of nature, and the procedure of Providence, are directed in a combined operation for their welfare. They look on the *good* in the system, in its mere natural, material character of good,—but little aware that this is made to impart a far higher, nobler, kind of good, to “*them that love God.*” And they regard the *evil* (the suffering, the affliction) as simply evil ; hardly sensible that this, even this, is turned to infinite advantage to the children of God.

The proud and mighty ones of the earth are exerting their utmost power and devices to make “*all things*” serve their interests.—their aggrandizement,—fame,—or luxury ; never dreaming that the Almighty Potentate is making “*all things,*” and *them* among the rest, co-operate for the advantage of his friends ; and many of these being such as they would disdain to look upon. Monarchs are thus unconsciously tributaries to their subjects ; tyrant lords are performing service to their slaves. And when these lofty and arrogant beings are working with all their might against one another, in prodigious contests and conflicts, little do they suspect that they are all the while co-operating, “*working together,*” for the benefit of another class! Would not *that*, if it could suddenly

come on their perception, pacify them at once? "What!" they would say, on both sides, "what! working with all this strife, and tumult, and cost, for the advantage of those people they call *saints*!" The very pride that raised the contest, would still it!

"*All things*;" that is, all things that attend them in life;—all things that have a part in their lot. A large assertion! but where is the impossibility of its being true? A man whose soul is animated and sanctified by the love of God, what can he see, or hear, or encounter, from which, under the aid of the Divine Spirit, he absolutely cannot extract any good? what, in the world of nature? what, in the world of man? Even the worst thing he can behold, wickedness,—the worst he can hear, profaneness or blasphemy,—can he draw no good from them? With this holy affection glowing in his soul, suppose him placed (if by necessity, and not choice) in the very centre of a scene of excessive iniquity,—might he not draw from every point of the circuit something salutary? some manifestation of the nature of man,—of the dreadful nature of sin,—the rectitude of the divine law,—the justice of the divine judgments,—the necessity of an omnipotent agency to convert the human soul? Might he not be struck with a religious horror lest himself should fall into sin? Or inspired with fervent thankfulness for having been saved or redeemed from it? might he not feel an emotion to implore the interference of Almighty Power? Thus he might, in the very worst field, reap invaluable spiritual advantage.

"*All things*." It were easy, but is unnecessary to

recount distinctly the kinds or classes of things. There are the temporal good things in this life—good in themselves, simply considered. Now it is a mighty thing to say, of any mortal, that these shall absolutely work for his good. But the prevalent love of God will make them do so; will excite thankful admiration of the divine bounty,—stimulate a zeal to serve God,—more benevolent compassion for those who are suffering the contrary of this temporal good,—and excite to active charity. To apprehend the value of the principle that thus sanctifies the use of the good things of this life, look at what they become in the hands of strangers to God!

But the most animating light of the glorious truth asserted in the text falls on the darker side of the view of human life,—on the harsher, the afflictive, portion of good men's experience. Like others, "*they that love God*" are passing through a field, a wilderness, where numberless evils are, as it were, let loose, to assail them,—to harass, pain, plague them. How many things are there with stings, with darts, with bitter cups! And all this evil affects them, in the first instance, in its own proper quality. The grand transmuting power comes in, not before, but after. If they are involved in great general calamities, there is alarm, anxiety, sense of hazard and peril, deprivation, struggles under hardships, and perhaps destitution. But all this may be made the means far more effectually to convince them that, "*this is not their rest*;"—that this world will not do for them;—to promote their submissive adoration of an all-governing, wise though

mysterious Providence,—and to inspire an energy of desire and effort toward a better country. And so far as they feel this to be the inestimable effect, will they not bless God even for the cause ?

The apostles had often to enforce and magnify this great topic of consolation, in reference to the persecutions to which they that loved God, and were the followers of Christ, were doomed. And when the sufferers found, that amidst their tribulations, their faith was invigorated,—their patience consolidated,—their dedication to God rendered more absolute,—their view of heaven brought nearer, and looking the brighter for the intervening gloom,—they were enabled to “*rejoice in tribulation*,” from the experience that all was working “*for good*.” There was no possible good on earth so great to them, as that which their afflictions were working for them.

But there are the more ordinary pains and grievances of life, incident at all times ; bodily sufferings,—distress in the family,—frustrated cares and exertions—or wrongs suffered from the injustice of men. But what pious man, that has suffered these, has not to tell, that such things (under divine discipline) have contributed to wrench him from the idolatry of the world, and, as it were, to force him to seek his all in God ?

And even the evils of a spiritual kind ; the pains of conscience,—fears of the divine wrath,—plunges of temptation,—perplexities concerning religious truth ;—through these, as a severe discipline, many minds have been drawn and exercised, to the attainment of a happy elevation of Christian

maturity, sanctity, and peace. The spiritual good is infinitely the noblest to which the evils of life can be made to work. But it might be added, that it has sometimes been in the plan of Providence to direct their co-operation to a great temporal good ; as in the case of Jacob, who said, "*All these things are against me ;*" in the instance also of Job. But still, the highest good is, that the soul be made better.

Each agency, separately taken, may be made beneficial. But observe the force of the word "*together.*" The Almighty does not work by means and agencies apart, but by their concurrence and combination. He keeps in order of co-operation what appears to us a vast confusion of things. But for the faith of this, his servants might look on the crowd and tumult of things with an utter distraction in their calculations and hopes. They behold a thousand different things in action (each doing something) around them. But how they can be all,—or, often, any small number of them, co-operating to any one effect, they cannot comprehend or conjecture. Often they appear in utter counteraction, baffling and destroying the effects of one another. Yet faith is assured there is a stupendous invisible machinery which holds them all working in connection ! And he that loves and adores God dares not point to one of them and say, "That is absolutely needless," or, "That obstructs rather than co-operates or conduces."

But what admiration is due to the wisdom and power that *can*, and to the goodness that *will*, make all "*work together for good !*" Sometimes, in the

result, it has become evident of what essential importance, in the process, was some apparently very little or trifling thing in the combined number of things. And then it may have occurred to a devout man to reflect, on the supposition that, during the process, he might have been permitted a sovereign discretion to throw out that one little circumstance, as trifling, needless, and impertinent, what the consequence would have been !

“ *Work together.*” Taking a narrower view, we may observe, that sometimes we have seen one thing operating, and another, and another,—each in some sort of reference and tendency to an end, but still with little effect, or apparent coincidence,—till at length one thing more, unthought of, has come in, and *that* has instantly brought them all into combination, and thrown all their forces, in conjunction, directly upon the object, the effect.

It is not impossible, even, that in some instances, a concurrence of different and opposite temptations may have been made to work the safety of a good man, who would have been deeply endangered by any one of them coming separately. God can bring the required causes to “*work together.*” If the secret designs of Providence, for a certain space of time forward, might be revealed to us, it would be seen, that many good things, intended for one and another of God’s servants now living, depend on a co-operation of causes that are at this hour widely asunder,—perhaps depend, for example, on the meeting of several persons, who are at this time in several and distant parts of the world, and entire strangers to

one another, possibly even in name. But they are certain to meet, and in co-operation perform the appointed service to him that God intends it for. And often both he and they may hereafter wonder at that strange management of Providence which so brought it to pass. In short, in ways beyond number, that declaration is continually in the process of being verified, "*All things are yours, the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours,*" and this is because they "*are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*"

And, finally, this is but the introductory state of privilege, to result in that greater state, in which it is promised to the faithful and victorious, that they "*shall inherit all things.*" And thus how true it is, that "*godliness,*" the love of God, "*is profitable for all things,*" "*having the promise,*" in the highest sense, of "*the life that now is, and of that which is to come!*"

LECTURE XXII.

PRACTICAL ATHEISM.

EPHESIANS ii. 12.

“ Without God in the world.”

WE have often occasion to wonder that brief expressions, descriptive of actual conditions of men, do not strike us far more forcibly, do not convey more to thought, and awake more emotion. For example, suppose it to be said, “At this very time, this hour, even this minute, a great number of human beings are dying.” A positive fact; but what is it to die? what would it appear if I were with the dying? what, if I were in the act of dying? But a great number are in this very situation!—think! Following their flight from the world, suppose it said, “A multitude of human beings are now in heaven!” But suppose it said (another solemn fact), “A vast number are now in hell.” But revert to things on earth; let it be said—“Enemies to God—there is a prodigious army of such;”—or our text, *“ Without God in the world.”* Think what a description, and applicable to individuals without number! If it had been, “without friends — without food — without

shelter"—that would have had a gloomy sound ; but—" *without God !*" Without Him ! that is, in no happy relation to him who is the very origin, support, and life of all things ;—without him, who can make good flow to his creatures from an infinity of sources ;—without him, whose favour possessed, is the best, the sublimest of all delights, all triumphs, all glories ;—without him, who can confer an eternal felicity ; without him ! but, how is he lost, withdrawn ? What do those, who are under so sad a destitution, value and seek instead ? But what will anything or all things be worth in his absence ? Without him, too, in a world where the human creature knows there is a mighty and continual conspiracy against his welfare. We fall unspeakably below the true and dreadful emphasis of the expression, after we have given our utmost aggravation to its significance. And still it is but the description of an actual condition. And should not each one be intent on having good assurance that it is not his condition ?

It may be instructive to consider, a little, to what states of mind the description is applicable, and what a wrong and calamitous thing the condition is in all of them. We need not dwell on that condition of humanity in which there is no notion of Deity at all,—the condition of some outcast savage tribes. Think of souls destitute of the very idea ! not one idea exalted and resplendent above the rest,—casting a glory sometimes across the little intellectual field ; (as if, in the outward world of nature, they had no visible heaven),—the spirit nothing to go out to, beyond its clay walls, but the immediately surrounding

elements, and other creatures of the same order. But think of a rational, intelligent nature, debased, in these remote sections, to so melancholy an extreme !

The adorers of false gods may just be named as coming under the description. There is, almost throughout the race, a feeling in men's souls that belongs to the Divinity. But think how all manner of objects, real and imaginary, have been supplicated to accept and absorb this feeling, that the true God may not take it. Men have been willing to fill the world, the universe, with gods, and do homage to them all, rather than acknowledge, and adore, and love, "*the blessed and only Potentate.*" And a confirmed negation of him, to the mind and the heart of man, is the curse inflicted in return, by all these infernal fallacies.

It is too obvious, almost, to be worth noting, how plainly the description applies itself to those who persuade themselves that there is no God. We may believe some of them, on their own testimony, that they have attained to this deliberate opinion. To them there is no Supreme Intelligence in the universe. Mind, spirit, would evidently be the glory of all existence, a superlatively precious and noble kind of being ; and then one Supreme Spirit, self-existent, and the author of all other existence, would be the transcendent object for every admiring, adoring and devoted sentiment. To the Atheist there is *nothing* in place of that which is the supremacy of all existence and glory. The Divine Spirit and all spirits being abolished, he is left amidst masses and

systems of matter, without a First Cause, ruled by chance, or by a blind mechanical impulse of what he calls fate ; and, as a little composition of atoms, he is himself to take his chance ; for a few moments of conscious being, and then to be no more for ever. And yet, in this infinite prostration of all things, he feels an elation of intellectual *pride* !

But we have to consider the text in an application much more important to *us*, and to men in general ; with a most settled belief of the Divine Existence, they may be “*without God in the world.*” This is too truly and sadly the applicable description, when this belief and its object do not maintain, habitually, the ascendant influence over us ; over the whole system of our thoughts, feelings, purposes, and actions. That there is such a Being, is a principle that evidently claims to interfere in everything. My very existence is from him, and depends on him ; all it contains, and all it acts, must therefore be in a solemn relation to him. And everything in my spirit and conduct, should acknowledge that relation. That relation is to be maintained in such a manner that I may be in harmony and conformity with him. That relation constitutes the law of good and evil, and fixes an awful sanction on the difference. In an endless series of things,—that there is such a Being, and that I belong to him, is a reason *for* one thing, and *against* another. The thought of him is to be associated with all these things, and its influence to be preponderant. “Thus—and thus—I think—and wish—and will—and act—*because*—there is a God.” Now, for me to forget or disregard all this, is

to remove myself, as far as I can, from God,—to cause, as far as I am able, that to me there is no God. It is a practical conformity to the Atheist's speculative disbelief. Let, then, a man ask himself, "If I proceed thus, ought not my opinion to be that of the Atheist?" And let each man examine and judge, whether there be many things in his soul and his life, which require this opinion, in order to his being consistent. And let us all examine ourselves, whether we live under a prevailing, powerful, all-pervading sentiment of God; or whether the thought of him be slight, remote, uninfluential,—and very often absent altogether.

We wish we could describe, with distinctness, several of the ways or forms in which this disregard of God is seen to prevail.

For one; we are placed amidst the amazing scene of his works, extending on all sides, from the point where we stand, to far beyond anything *we* can distinctly conceive of INFINITY; in a diversity, which not eternal duration will suffice for any creature to take account of all; having, within one day, one hour, one instant, operations, changes, appearances, to which the greatest angel's calculating faculty would be nothing; combining design—order—beauty—sublimity—utility. Such is the scene to be contemplated. But now, while our attention wanders over it, or fixes on parts of it, do we regard it but as if it were something existing by itself? Can we glance over the earth, and into the wilderness of worlds in infinite space, without being impressed with the solemn thought, that all this is but the sign and

proof of something infinitely more glorious than itself? Are we not reminded,—this, is a production of his almighty power ;—that, is an adjustment of his all-comprehending intelligence and foresight ;—there, is a glimmer, a ray, of his beauty, his glory ;—there, an emanation of his benignity ;—and there, some fiery trace of his justice ;—but for him, all this would never have been ;—and if, for a moment, his pervading energy were, by his will, restrained or suspended,—what would it all be then? Not to have some such perceptions and thoughts, accompanied by devout sentiment, is so far to be “*without God in the world.*” And that there should be men who can survey the creation with a scientific enlargement of intelligence, and then say, “*there is no God,*” is one of the most hideous phenomena in the world.

Again, the text is applicable to those who have no solemn recognition of God’s all-disposing government and Providence ; who have no thought of the course of things but just as going on ; going on, some way or other, just as it can ; to whom it appears abandoned to a strife and competition of various mortal powers ; or surrendered to something they call general laws,—and these blended with chance ; who have, perhaps, a crude Epicurean notion of exempting the Divine Being from the infinite toil and care of such a charge ; or think they see things managed so wrong that there cannot be a constant interference of sovereign power and wisdom. They do not discern and understand the indications manifest in some instances ; and have no faith with

respect to the darker parts of the system. With respect to their own lot, they feel themselves as committed in an unaided struggle and fight with difficulties, enemies, and accidents ; and so have no habitual trust or hope in the providential wisdom and care. If God be in the world, with an all-presiding Providence, those who do not acknowledge it, really and practically, are "*without Him in the world.*"

The text is a description of all those who are forming or pursuing their scheme of life and happiness independently of Him. They do not consult his counsel or will as to what that scheme should be, in its ends or means. They *will* have a plan of pursuit and well-being to please themselves, without much inquiring, or caring whether it be one that he will approve. They, perhaps, slightly wish that it could please both, but "it *shall* please *me* ;" "this I like—and that I covet—and the other would be the very summit of happiness, no matter whether He has signified '*a more excellent way.*'" And then the confidence of realizing happiness on such a plan ! His favour, his blessing, are not absolutely indispensable ; we can be happy, leaving him out of the account. The probabilities—the presumptions rather—of life, health, and success, are in our favour, according to the ordinary course of things, and we will embark on this. For the present, we can do without him : if our schemes fail, we can but turn to him at last. So he is forgotten, and the deluded schemer goes into the world, and after it, with all his might, "*without God in the world.*" But if a brief illumination of truth might glare out upon a man, and his schemes and prospects,

what amazement and horror would seize him, to find himself thus impiously employed ; thus presuming to work out for himself a chief good of his existence ; carelessly, independently, and in defiance of Him that is the Sovereign Good !—in effect, saying, “ I’ll make trial whether they were not in the right who were reproached with ‘ *loving and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.* ’ ”

The text is a description of those who have but a slight sense of universal accountableness to God as the supreme authority ;—who have not a conscience, constantly looking and listening to him, and testifying for him ;—who proceed as if this world were a province absolved from the strictness of his dominion and laws ;—who will not apprehend that there is his will and warning affixed to everything ;—who will not submissively ask, “ What dost thou pronounce on this ? ” To be insensible to the Divine character as lawgiver, rightful authority, and judge, is truly to be, “ *without God in the world ;* ” for thus every action of the soul and the life assumes that he is absent, or not exists.

This insensibility of accountableness exists almost entire—a stupefaction of conscience—in very many minds. But in many others there is a disturbed, yet inefficacious feeling. And might not some of these be disposed to say, “ We are *not* without God in the world, as an awful authority and judge,—for we are followed and harassed, and persecuted, quite to misery, by the thought of him in this character,—we cannot go on peacefully in the way our inclinations lead,—a portentous sound alarms us,—a formid-

able spectre encounters us,—though we still persist.”

The case is, here, that men *wish* to be “*without God in the world* ;” they would, in preference to any other prayer, implore him to depart, “*for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*.” They would be willing to resume the enterprise of the rebellious angels, if there were any hope. “Oh, that he, with his laws and judgments, were infinitely far away !” To be thus with God, is, in the most emphatical sense, to be without him—without him as a friend, approver, and patron. Each thought of him tells the soul, *who* it is that it is without ! and *who* it is, in a very fearful sense, it never can be without !

The description belongs to that state of mind in which there is no communion with him, maintained, or even sought, with cordial aspiration ;—no devout, ennobling converse held with him ;—no conscious reception of delightful impressions—sacred influences—suggested sentiments ;—no pouring out of the soul in fervent desires for his illuminations—his compassion—his forgiveness—his transforming operations ;—no earnest, penitential, hopeful pleading in the name of the great Intercessor ;—no solemn, affectionate dedication of the whole being ;—no animation and vigour obtained for the labours and the warfare of a Christian life. But how lamentable to be thus “*without God* !” Consider it in one single view only, that of the *loneliness* of a human soul in this destitution. All other beings are necessarily (shall we express it so ?) extraneous to the soul ; they may communicate with it, but they are still separate and

without it ; an intermediate vacancy keeps them for ever asunder, so that the soul must be, in a sense, in an insuperable and eternal solitude—that is, as to all creatures. But, on the contrary, God has an all-pervading power—can interfuse, as it were, his very essence through the being of his creatures,—can cause himself to be apprehended and felt as absolutely *in* the soul ;—such an intercommunion as is, by the nature of things, impossible between created beings. And, thus, the interior, central loneliness, the solitude of the soul, is banished by a perfectly intimate presence, which imparts the most affecting sense of society—a society, a communion, which imparts life and joy, and may continue in perpetuity. To men completely immersed in the world, this might appear a very abstracted and enthusiastic notion of felicity ; but to those who have, in any measure, attained it, the idea of its loss would give the most emphatic sense of the expression, “ *without God in the world.*”

The terms are a true description, also, of the state of mind, in which there is no habitual anticipation of the great event of going, at length, into the presence of God ;—in which, there is an absence of the thought of being with him in *another* “*world*”—of being with him in judgment—and whether to be with him for ever ;—not considering that he awaits us somewhere,—that the whole movement of life is absolutely towards him,—that the course of life is deciding in what manner we shall appear in his presence ;—not thinking what manner of fact that will be,—what experience, what consciousness, what emotions ;—not

regarding it as the grand purpose of our present state of existence, that we may attain a final dwelling in his presence.

One more, and the last, application we would make of the description is, to those who, while professing to retain God in their thoughts with a religious regard, frame the religion, in which they are to acknowledge him, according to their own speculation and fancy. Thus, many rejecters of Divine revelation have professed, nevertheless, a reverential homage to the Deity ; but the God of their faith was to be such as their sovereign reason chose to feign ; and, therefore, the theory and mode of their religion was entirely arbitrary. But if revelation be true, the simple question is, will the Almighty acknowledge your feigned god for himself, and admit your religion as equivalent to that which he has declared and defined ? If he should not, you are "*without God in the world.*"

This is, unavoidably, the condition, also, of those who reject anything which he has declared essential to the relation of being in acceptance and peace with him. If this happy connexion be, as we believe, appointed to subsist alone through a Mediator constituted as a substitute, sacrifice, and atonement, then the rejection of this constitution abolishes the connecting medium between man and God,—and the one is "*without*" the other.

Such are the general illustrations, faintly exhibited, of the grave and formidable import of the text. We intended briefly to add a few practical exemplifications of the bad and miserable effects of such estrangement

from God, as seen in youth,—in the active, busy occupation with worldly concerns,—in general, social converse,—in times of temptation,—in situations of affliction and sorrow,—in old age,—and in death.

And now, surely this is not the condition for us to be content with for one hour,—for us, who are cast, for a short period, upon a scene of vanities, dangers, and ruins, with a nature full of want, helplessness, and disorder. Content! with this destitution, while *He* is here, the Almighty Power—while we can find him,—accost him,—importune him. Let us implore him not to permit our spirits to be detached from him, abandoned, exposed, and lost;—not to let them be trying to feed their immortal fires on transitory sustenance, but to attract them, exalt them, and hold them in his communion for ever.

LECTURE XXIII.

GOD NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS.

ACTS x. 34.

“ God is no respecter of persons.”

THOUGH this may be an unwelcome declaration, as regarding a minor division of mankind, it must be accounted a favourable one, as affecting the vastly greater proportion of them ; since it affirms, that those who have not any conspicuous pretensions to make (and that is the far greater number), do not stand before Him on any ground of comparative disadvantage.

Here, in this point of *respect of persons*, we have one of the many strong contrasts between God and man. And, perhaps, the most simple and useful way of employing our thoughts a little while on the subject set forth in the text would be, to name a few of those well known things which draw respect to men's persons, and observe how differently they are accounted of by God and by man.

In comparing man and God, as to that which they both do, that is, *estimating persons*—we may notice, in the outset, a grand difference, antecedent to that

suggested by the text, that is,—man's estimate is of very limited compass as to the number of persons taken account of—God's is universal. Men, any particular men, can take account of but very few persons for either respect or contempt. Ourselves, for instance, on how few of mankind can we exercise any judgment whatever, to estimate their claims to respect, or anything about them. Look at the multitude of the inhabitants of a great city, or of any province of a country,—what a great majority of them we can have no individual estimate of at all! And then, think of a nation,—and the whole world. There are, indeed, a few distinguished persons in each part of a country, whom most of the inhabitants know something about,—a few that a whole nation knows by repute;—several who have a character in the estimate of a great part of the civilized world, but what a diminutive number do these make! Excepting all but a comparative few, each person has an extremely limited sphere in which to be respected, or the contrary, by his fellow mortals.

But God, our all-knowing judge, has his estimate of every person of the entire race.

But to the immediate subject: *the respect of persons*, so prevalent among men, can have no place with God, because to him the whole world of mere exteriors is as nothing. Man is the dupe and idolater of them, all over the world. Nothing so mean or bad, but if a fine appearance can be thrown over it, it becomes as a god to him; his soul seems chiefly to live in his senses. It is amazing to think

of how little account with men is the pure reality of things. And then, think how all the dazzling, delusive externals vanish in the sight of God. He beholds and estimates men in their intrinsic qualities. What an infinity of superficial, extraneous shows *part* off from them under that inspection,—*that* is foreign to the man—and again *that*! What a different thing must *man* appear when all these are fled! And if men could be presented thus to one another, what would become of most of the human gods of human idolatry? It is true that men are not to be reproached for not banishing entirely all these superficial appearances, for not looking on men with a solar radiance which would penetrate and disperse every fallacy that invests them. The feebleness of our vision cannot do this entirely. But it is true, also, that we are far too willing to be imposed on by the delusive show of the world.

Again; men are respecters of persons from a principle of self-interest. They are looking up to certain men, and thinking what advantages they can confer;—what profit,—what favour,—what honour, or—sometimes what evil, they have the power to inflict. This, no doubt, produces a great deal of hypocrisy,—of feigned respect. But, also, it does really magnify these persons in their esteem. There are multitudes thus looking to certain individuals with homage, as if they were the grand rulers and disposers of their destiny. In effect saying, “In his favour is my life.” It were but trifling to show how the Divine Being can be under no such influence in his estimates.

In men's respecting of persons, some are foolish enough to do it, because others do, without well knowing any other reason why. As a number of persons collected at a real or supposed spectacle will quickly draw a multitude. So, let an individual come, by any means, to be accounted of importance, by a portion of society, and it is curious to observe what an accession there shall soon be of respectful opinions, tributary speeches, manners of deference. Each individual feels as if he were the wiser and safer for thinking with many,—as if he took the strength of the collective opinions into his own.

God has no opinion in the universe to regard, respecting men or anything else, but his own. What is it to Him that one diminutive creature after another adds its slender intellect in affirmation of the judgment of a crowd. In every view, he is infinitely superior to the influence of all the causes by which men are made to be "*respecters of persons*." Contemplate this his divine superiority, in reference to several of those things which command men's highest respect. For example, we all see how men are affected toward persons of great wealth. This, perhaps, is the most obvious of all the exemplifications of this human folly. The impression made by this wealth, when displayed or acknowledged, is instantaneous, and it is almost universal. What deference, what regulated and subdued demeanour — what attention to what is said,—what prompt compliance! Suppose a man, in the first instance, not known to be rich, and the impression he makes shall be simply that of his apparent personal qualities, — his

dispositions, — his sense, — his manners. And suppose it then to become suddenly known that he is very rich,—what a difference ! The movements of such persons are observed and reported, as matters of importance. Some good that they do, perhaps in no proportion to their superior means, shall be proclaimed and lauded. Their opinions shall be cited as of weight, when it is, evidently, no superiority of reason or knowledge that makes them so. A very considerable degree of misconduct or vice does not put them down in society. Their acquaintance and company shall be held reputable and courted, when the same ill character in men of no wealth would make them shunned. They can at once defy opinion, and be sure of obsequiousness.

What a state of human sentiments is this in the sight of God ! He “*is no respecter of persons.*” He regards them as of the common material of humanity. He does not mistake their wealth for a part of them ; does not concentrate the cares of his Providence peculiarly on them,—not less requires a sense of entire dependence ;—does not, if they pray, give a precedence to their applications ;—does not hold them less guilty in their sins ;—does not give them sounder or more lasting bodies, or an exemption from the worst evils of the mortal state ;—does not adopt an instant change of sentiment respecting them, if they fall from affluence to poverty ;—does not ensure them that in the other world they shall be glad they have been rich in this !

Distinguishable from this, another thing which draws great respect to persons, is, high station in what is

called rank, and in power. High descent is one considerable thing in this mode of superiority, the inherited quality of what are called "the Great ;" and there is dignity of office ;—and power, in its most direct forms, and widest reach. And look what "*respect*" there is for "*persons*" on this ground ! In former times the case has been, (and in many parts of the world it is so still) that the multitude have regarded this class of persons as actually being of some mysteriously higher order of human nature ; and, indeed, in some ages and places, they have assumed to be really and specifically so. Still there is quite enough "*respect*" to gratify their utmost pride,—pompous titles of honour, as if to disguise the fact that they are plainly no more than mere men—a vast parade of state and ceremony,—a whole artificial system, with every gaudy appendage to confound and overawe men's perceptions and feelings into homage. And the tribute demanded is paid. Some one of these persons is regarded as if he included as much as the collective value of hundreds or thousands of common mortals—" *thou art worth ten thousand of us.*" The ground is cleared for them, in society, wherever they appear ;—the insolence of their very dependants and menials is patiently submitted to ;—their mere will, or caprice, is considered as authority, without requiring a reason ;—their misfortunes are themes for romance and tragedy ;—the worship of God itself, is deemed to be vastly honoured if they deign to pay it some formalities of attention,—the leading performer in such worship feeling far more respect for them than

for its Object, and regarding one of them present as of more importance than all the assembly together besides. If they be of the most notorious and inveterate profligacy, any trifling equivocal circumstance that looks like an acknowledgment of religion, is magnified into an auspicious phenomenon,—an indubitable symptom of some great and happy change. Every conceivable palliation is adduced, by force, in their behalf, to extenuate the grossness of sin. Men that maintain a better character themselves, are gratified, as being highly honoured, by the favourable attentions of the vicious great. In extreme cases (but indeed such have often occurred), the public good is yielded up a sacrifice to the pride and other bad passions of the persons predominant in power. There are pompous funeral celebrations of the virtues of the worst and meanest persons when departed.

So much for men's "*respect*;" now turn the thought to God. At *that* thought, how base and contemptible appears all this perversion and extravagance of human feeling! Think! if He had any partiality like this, what would become of his just government and judgment of the world? What would then have been his dispensations in Egypt, in Babylon, in Judea? What would then be the condition of the oppressed, when they cry and appeal to him? of the humble, the poor, the despised, when they have recourse to him, as being their best or only friend? What hope would there be, that when "*two or three*" inferior mortals are met in his name, he should be "*there in the midst of them?*" He looks

on all these distinctions, pretensions, and splendours, as the mere transitory accidents of the mortal condition. He commissions no augmented guard of angels in honour of them. He requires the same lessons of humiliation, self-abasement, and repentance, to be learned by all these loftier persons, as by the meanest,—or they reject them at their peril. And his great messenger, Death, makes, as it were, melancholy sport of all these robes of grandeur. To see! how he rends them off, and scatters them on the ground.

The one other chief imposing object in men's respect of persons is, great mental endowment. And this is different from the others, in being a more intrinsic quality of its possessors. And from that cause, and from its being of a nature less obvious to vulgar and general apprehension, it has nothing like so many idolaters. It would, in most cases, be as nothing, for gaining this homage, in comparison and competition with opulence and splendid condition. Nevertheless, it has always been an object of perverted and extravagant regard. Every epithet appropriate to divinity has been applied. There are, at this hour, many enthusiastic admirers of human talent, who are despisers of God! It has been hailed with the utmost applause in its efforts of hostility to truth and religion. Many a work of genius has been so accounted of, as if the bible were only fit to be burnt as incense to the author. The most fantastic theories of ingenious men have been zealously adopted as systems of solemn truth. Great ability has been honoured for confounding the distinctions between good and evil;—and has given

exquisite delight in sporting with all that is the most serious. In behalf of profligate men of great talent there has been and is, a disposition to suspend or abrogate the most essential laws of morality. No mode of the "*respect of persons*" can be more absurd or pernicious than all this. And short of such an extreme, it may be excessive. There are persons who have no relish, hardly any tolerance, for truth, the most important, the most deeply concerning them, but as displayed in the style of genius or eloquence ;—they turn with contempt from the most appropriate and serious instructions, given in a plainness of conception and language ; as if the grave matter were nothing, and the individual manner, the decorations, were all. There are some who habitually, as a settled principle, indulge contempt for all who are not distinguished by mental superiority, of whatever excellence otherwise. And very generally, this kind of respect of persons goes the length of causing that the Supreme Intelligence is far too little regarded. We look to human spirits as the oracles, the luminaries of our world, and little revere, and little implore the communications from "*the Father of lights.*"

But think of *Him* ! What is all this in his sight ? The Being whose intellect pervades all things,—who has infinite intuition. One has often had the idea, what is the greatest human intellect, compared with what we may justly conceive of the least angelic spirit ? What may even that spirit be, compared to the most elevated created mind ? What is *that*,—what are all minds together, as compared, if there

might be a comparison, with the awful Original? Well may He be "*no respecter of persons!*" In his view, how little difference between the least and the greatest mind on earth! And justly may he suffer those who respect human intellect more than him, to fall into all the errors and delusions, into which perverted and worshipped human intellect has seduced men.

Such is the manner in which man, and in which God, regards the proud distinctions of humanity. And if God did not, in this, differ from man, what would be the consequence? While such have been the great objects of homage, it would be striking to consider what things, in man, have obtained no such universal respect or admiration,—elevated piety, extreme conscientiousness, plain, diligent usefulness, self-denial, and indifference to this world for the sake of another. But such are the things most regarded by the Almighty. There is great consolation in such a view of the difference of God's account of men from that which the world entertains. And cogent instruction that our manner of estimating things and men should be conformed to his. And the subject necessarily makes a reference to the last great Account. Let us look that way, whenever we feel ourselves falling into the world's manner of estimating the human condition and character. What a reversal, what a new order of estimates then, when *He* shall come to be the Judge, who was himself "*despised and rejected of men!*"

September 8, 1825.

LECTURE XXIV.

MAN'S DEVICES AND GOD'S COUNSEL.

PROVERBS xix. 21.

“ There are many devices in a man's heart ; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, it shall stand.”

COMPARISONS between God and man are continually occurring in the scriptures, and in all religious books and discourse. There is, from this, a possible wrong consequence, against which we have to guard ; namely, that of lessening our sense of the infinite disparity of the objects. Whatever may be the distance which is expressly signified in the terms of the comparison, the fact that they may be, and are, compared at all, tends to reduce our conception of the greatness of the Almighty. It is so, when the comparison is that of parallel or likeness ; as in goodness, sanctity, perfection. And it is so, too, when it is that of contrast ; for, though the contrast be meant to display the immense difference, yet the mere circumstance of the conjunction of the ideas of a diminutive creature—an atom of existence, and an infinite Being, has somewhat of the effect (if we may so express it,) of keeping down the idea of that in-

finity. Two objects that we can take in the same view, do not seem infinitely different. We shall do well to endeavour against this disadvantageous effect, by rising to the contemplation of the Most High in his own absolute nature, as above all comparison. And our doing this, sometimes, in a solemn and devotional spirit, will contribute to our receiving a stronger impression of the magnitude of the difference, when we are called to contemplate man and God in contrast. Our text calls us to behold them in this relation. "*There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, it shall stand.*"

"*A man's heart*" is a little world, full of scheming and business. It is *that* that keeps the individual, and the mighty world of mankind, alive and in motion. If we might suppose an almighty Power, by one great act, to quash, at once, all the devices in all men's hearts, — what a dead scene the world would become! something analogous to what Mahomedan legends have fabled of a city where all the people were suddenly turned to stone, to be seen there still in that state, far within some untraversed desert.

If we could have a full inspection of one man's heart! — but each man may of his own! Let him review its "*devices*," its schemes, its designs, in their succession. There was one, on which he expended ten thousand, fifty thousand distinct acts of thought, — and, with those thoughts, mingled his affections, and passions, earnestly busy. Another and, perhaps, still another followed, keeping his soul in action, as if

the sovereign good of his existence had depended on it. At some junctures there may have been a plurality and rivalry of schemes, crowding his heart, and agitating it almost to distraction. But, perhaps, he cannot long employ himself in recollecting past schemes, in quietness, for the stir that is kept up in his mind by a present one. There is, then, a thing *now* working the machinery of his mind. Let him observe how it puts him in trains of thought,—how it draws his affections around it, and, as it were, eats them up ; calls him off from other things which he has to attend to. In the same manner, another man,—and the next,—and still the next, and so through the endless multitudes of the race.

Advert to the variety in the kinds of “*devices*,” and in men’s temper and manner, with respect to them. Many of these schemes have a most insignificant object,—some a grave and ambitious one. Many of them are of very short reach,—others planned for the attainment of a distant object, through a long course of accomplishment, not to be completed, perhaps, till after the death of the schemers. Some men are very communicative of their hearts’ “*devices* ;” so full of them, delighted with them, that they must talk and enlarge, as if the hearers had none of their own to be interested about. Some are close, reserved, dark,—from the pride, it may be, of having schemes and thoughts all their own ;—or, because, their designs are such as will not bear to be disclosed. Some are eager and hasty in their prosecution ; others can proceed in their purpose with coolness, cau-

tion, and patient perseverance,— wait for opportunities, — vary their expedients. In short, all diversities that there are of human disposition, give their characters respectively to the heart's "*devices*," and to the manner of endeavouring their accomplishment.

Now suppose, just for a moment, that all these devices of all men could be brought out, in full manifestation ! Then you would have human nature displayed, in its real quality. What manner of spectacle would it be ? But suppose, further, that all these "*devices*" could be realized, or were realized, that is, accomplished. What a world you would have then ! But it is only for a moment that we *can* suppose such a thing ; because there is an infinite contrariety in these "*devices*." In an infinity of cases, one man's device cannot be accomplished compatibly with the accomplishment of another's. It may be doubted whether more than half of the cherished designs of all human hearts be not in this predicament. In many instances, men are mutually aware of this ; each of two persons knows the other's design, and that the success of the other's would infallibly be the frustration of his own. In other cases they do not know, but suspect, this mortal contrariety. In numberless others, it exists, though unknown and unsuspected. Now, supposing all men could be set loose to accomplish in the most direct way what their hearts are devising, what would be the consequence ? We have partial illustrations in the wars almost continual among nations or potentates ;—in the violent strifes and quarrels which

occur between little portions of the community, or individuals ;—in daring acts of wrong or revenge. Consider what a grand object of study and provision it has been, throughout all civilized, or even half-civilized society, through all ages, to put a restraint on the execution of the devices of men's hearts. Consider the immense labour of legislation,—the vast array of preventions and securities,—the universal conviction that there is devising in men's hearts what would be ruinous if carried into action.

But what a consideration it is, that "*the devices of a man's heart,*" taken all together, are his scheme for being happy. And so the great collective whole of the "*devices*" of all hearts, constitutes the grand complex scheme of the human race for their happiness.

Such is the vast confused total of the devices which the Omniscient Searcher of hearts has to look upon in this world. And while he sees every part and the whole, his single immense will—his one all-comprehending system of design, is co-extended (shall we say) with the entire breadth of the scene,—confronting it at every point, and, indeed, stretches away beyond it to infinity like the sky, expanded beyond our earth to other worlds. So that to every device of all hearts, his "*counsel,*" his design, exists parallel, whether in coincidence or opposition. In other words, respecting the object of every device, he has *his* design. Now there is a world where also this is the case, but where every "*device,*" or design, in the thoughts of his creatures is coincident with his. Glorious state! but how lamentably otherwise in *this* world!

The text plainly implies a great disconformity,—a want of coalescence between the designs of Man and God ; an estranged spirit of design on the part of Man. And the case actually is so in the world. It is so in two ways, or rather, perhaps, say degrees ; for many of the designs in men's hearts are formed *independently* of God,—many *in contrariety* to him.

First ; independently of Him. In what proportion of men's internal devisings may we conjecture that there is any real acknowledgment of God ? One in ten ? One in twenty ? In beginning to entertain the design, there is no question made, will this be approved by Him ? “It pleases *me*, and that's enough.” It is not considered, that the scheme can come to no real good but as put under his direction. It is not considered that our powers, our means, our life, for the prosecution, are wholly dependent on Him. There is a thoughtless assumption, “I shall live, doubtless, long enough for any such designs. My means are so and so ;—competent to the purpose, I hope ;—opportunities such and such may be reckoned on ;—nothing extraordinary is likely to happen to frustrate. If I *should* meet with ill fortune, why, it cannot be helped.”

The whole devising and prosecution are in a spirit just as if there were no such thing as Providence to aid or defeat. Of course, there is no committing of the concern to God for his direction and blessing. “It's all my own affair, for better and worse.” And there is no principle in the mind, preparing it to be grateful to Him for success, or submissive in the event of failure. Now, is this a false description, as applied

to nineteen of twenty parts of the devisings of men's hearts ? It is deplorable, the while, thus to see dependent, frail, short-sighted creatures, confidently taking on themselves the counsel, execution, and hazard of their schemes for being happy, in the very presence, and as in contempt, of the all-wise and almighty Director !

Secondly. But even this is not the worst ; man's heart entertains many devices *in contrariety* to God. In thoughtless and criminal ignorance, it admits suggestions of designs which it ought instantly to perceive to be in opposition to his declared will, and to startle at, as at the betrayed visages of evil spirits. It can deliberately adopt them, and set its faculties on adjusting the scheme, even when it does know the device to be against the divine approbation. It can prolong upon it the best exertions of thought to mature it, under the consciousness that to seek the divine aid and blessing upon it would be a flagrant absurdity. It can resolve upon it conclusively, under the certainty that the Almighty, if he do not blast it with failure, will punish both its success and the iniquity of devising it. Man's heart, therefore, can cherish "*devices*," which must, sometimes, involve a rebellious emotion of displeasure, almost resentment, that there is a Sovereign Lord, whose "*counsel shall stand*."

What a sublime and awful fact, that, all this while, there is one other Mind, which has the knowledge and command of all things, a fixed design, respecting them all, paramount to all designs and devices. Look at the vast, busy multitude, each intent on his scheme ! and then think of *Him*, serene in boundless and eternal power, surveying all this confusion of

schemes, and certain that *his* will be accomplished ! Think of the sovereign principle of wisdom and power in his counsel—the principle which makes all schemes of his creatures subservient to his design, whether by their fulfilment or their frustration. Think, what millions of these devices break up, and are nothing ; but both their formation and annihilation contribute something to his supreme purpose. Millions are in progress toward a positive result ; which result, whatever it be, will be taken into *his* intended and infallible result. How many men will, eventually, be amazed to see the issue of their schemes appearing as a part of his final success ; having had no such intention,—having devised them in perfect thoughtlessness of Him, or, perhaps, in a disposition consciously adverse to his will.

It might be beneficial, in our meditations, sometimes, to bring down such general ideas into particular exemplifications. A mighty assemblage of such particulars would come into our view from the scripture records ; for example, the “*device*” of Joseph’s brethren,—of Balak,—of Ahitophel,—of Haman,—of the enemies of Daniel,—of Herod,—and even of Judas Iscariot himself. This last “*device*” of the heart was so pre-eminently execrable that it is described by the expression of—“*Satan entering into him.*” And often, if wicked men, conceiving their designs, could suddenly be made sensible of their quality, they would be smitten with the horrible consciousness of having admitted, as it were, a devil into their souls,—prompting them to the execution,—and, in that very impulse, pushing them toward Hell.

In adverting to many of these "*devices*," we may observe that the counsel of the Lord is, sometimes, not to prevent the design taking effect in the first instance. He shows that he can let men bring their iniquitous purposes into effect, and then seize that very effect, reverse its principle of agency, and make it produce immense, unintended good. The wicked deviser prepares a poison, and puts the quality of his soul in it to make it intense. God can take this, and make it applicable to a purpose beneficially remedial. A malignant persecutor performs his intention of exterminating a number of Christians : God makes the "blood of the martyrs the seed of the church." But, be it always remembered, that the evil deviser will have no benefit of God's overruling action ; as to him the thing will ever be such as the intention was ; he will not be allowed to plead, "Good has, according to God's own judgment, resulted,—let it go to my account." He cannot say, at the last day, "See here, there are thousands of saints who became such, in one sense, in consequence of what I devised and executed."

Thus, in many instances, God permits, for his own purposes, the success, immediately considered, of evil "*devices*." But, in many others, he directly frustrates them, as in the case of Haman. How many instances have we read or heard of, in which, some sudden turn has exploded and blasted both the scheme and the man,—some most unlikely exposure,—some incident of intervention apparently casual, but in its effect, conspicuously providential. Often the device has not merely failed, but recoiled vindict-

ively, retributively, on the man who had formed it. "*The counsel of the Lord*" predominates. And think how many "*devices*" of man's heart there are, at this hour, for this sovereign counsel to predominate over. We might say to any man, "Consider, seriously, your internal designs, and then remember whose counsel there is besides! Reflect on your favourite device,—Can you appeal to Him for his approbation? Are you scheming something which conscience tells you is wrong? Consider!" At this hour there are men devising projects of injustice against their fellow mortals. Will they, can they, have any real good of these designs, while "*the righteous Lord*" maintains his power? To some men, the children of God are objects of special malice, "*and the wicked plotteth against the just, but the Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming.*" There may be a man, at this very time, contriving how he may traduce the character, motives, or conduct of some faithful servant of the Lord; diligently studying how he may throw suspicion,—render a misrepresentation plausible,—make an unexplained circumstance appear a crime. Let him look up at the awful countenance of the Vindicator!

There are many men, studying with all their might how they may oppose religion itself, God's own cause. Some of them devising arguments against its truth and reality—keenly intent on finding some defect of evidence—some contradiction,—some absurdity,—labouring, as if for the salvation of their souls, to throw some mist of dubiousness on what is the most palpable and bright. The "*counsel*

of the Lord" is, that his truth shall shine forth resplendently over the whole earth, and that *they* shall be driven into outer darkness.

Some are devising how to obstruct and baffle the practical measures for promoting religion,—and for their reward they see those expedients and exertions multiplying and extending in a wonderful manner. There may be even promoters of general knowledge, who are secretly anticipating, as a desirable consequence, that knowledge will ultimately explode religion—a mistaken calculation, it will be seen! That without which there cannot be religion, God will not allow to become the cause that there shall not be religion. He will not suffer the general mind to be awakened to think, for the very purpose of not thinking of Him.

But there may be devices in the heart, in contrariety to religion, of a nature less directly hostile—but tending to make void some essential, vital principle of it;—schemes for obtaining the divine favour, satisfying the divine justice,—obtaining final happiness, on a different ground from that revealed as the only one—such as the formalities of religion, or a man's own good works. "*The counsel of the Lord shall stand,*" that there shall be no redemption but through the work of his Son.

Devices there are, also, for getting rid of the strictness of the laws of God, qualifying and softening them,—equivocating with conscience. But he will maintain the great standard inflexible and eternal; and woe to those who shall have presumed to substitute a different one.

And, finally, there are the many schemes enter-

tained in the heart, of a nature not in opposition to God, if they be but formed in submission to his supreme disposal ; the various projects for temporal good,—the plans of life and action. Many of these will be disappointed and fail, during the fulfilment of God's own providential plan for our passage through life. What need, then, in entertaining such schemes, to remember the uncertainty of all sublunary things, and to resign all to His sovereign counsel,—that, when one device and another is frustrated, we may humbly and complacently repose in his determination as the best.

On a view of the whole matter, how important is it, that all the designs of the heart should, in principle, be conformed to the spirit of his unalterable counsel ;—that in all our projects we should be conscientiously and solicitously aiming at a general conformity to his will. *Then* we may rejoice in the “*devices*” that succeed,—and be assured that those which fail, do so because he has designed for us something better. We may even be assured, that schemes, formed in a sincere intention to serve and please him, will not, in being frustrated, lose their reward.

Last of all, let us remember that there is appointed a day when “*the secrets of all hearts will be revealed.*” How many devices which were formed and could not be carried into effect, will be exposed in illustration of the spirit of those who formed them ; how many black designs that never went further than their recess in the heart,—but also many pious and excellent ones. And so, not only the actions, but the “*thoughts and intents of the heart,*” will be of mighty effect in the final sentence.

LECTURE XXV.

CHRIST WALKING ON THE SEA.

MATTHEW xiv. 22—33. MARK vi. 45—56.

“And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away,” &c.

WE might begin with observing that there needs a special disposition, and a voluntary and earnest effort of the mind, to receive anything approaching to an adequate idea of such wonderful transactions in the history of our Lord. Persons who reflect on the state and movements of their own minds, sometimes recall a striking scene which has just been exhibited to them, in the sacred history, to think how they were affected by it at the time of reading it. And the wonder only *then* springs up,—a mingled wonder, partly at the thing itself, not till then duly admired,—and hardly a less wonder at themselves, that they should not have been more struck and amazed by what was presented to their attention. And they become conscious, (and reproach themselves for it,) that they did not give their full and fixed attention

to the wonderful object. If they proceed to ask themselves, *why*,—*how*, this could be, they may find several causes ; but the chief one is a criminal one—the want of a serious habit of mind,—and so, of the requisite sensibility and aptitude to take strong impressions of great things. A serious and religious habitude of mind is the indispensable adaptation for receiving the full impression.

But, besides this, there is required, as we said, an effort to bring the mind to a close or intimate contemplation of the object or the scene,—an endeavour to look on it as near, as thoughtfully as possible,—to have imagined how it would have been to have actually seen and heard. It is grievous to reflect, what a difference is made by distance of time and place. When we feel assured that the thing was *so*, what does it, in reality, signify that it is not *now*, and *here* ? When our souls can go out through all time and place, shall they, nevertheless, be so dependent on immediate impressions on the senses ? The mind might surely say, “What are time, and place, and actual seeing and hearing to me, while I *can* realize within myself the important transaction or spectacle which the infallible testimony describes to me ?”

It may, indeed, be of no material consequence whether we do this, with respect to many striking and wonderful things which are related and described to us. But, assuredly, it is of very great consequence when we come to such things as the amazing events related to us in the sacred history ; and, above all, those recorded of our Lord, in his visit and sojourn upon this earth. At each wonderful event

in that history, let the reader pause and ask, "What was this for, with respect to the people who beheld it? What was the feeling required in *them*, when they witnessed it? What feeling was it, which it was contemptible, and even wicked, for them not to have, at the time?" He can tell; and he reproaches them, — perhaps, is astonished at them, if they appear not to have felt such impression. "Well, but then," let him say, "how do these great events concern *me*? *What for*, does the divine testimony bring them to me? To amuse me? or merely to fill up a little space in history? *What for*? They are to certify to me the divine commission of Jesus Christ, — to display to me the power, the goodness, the glory of the Son of God, — to show me what an important, what a magnificent, what an awful, concern, was that of human salvation, and of mine; and *that* is a permanent concern, through time, and to eternity. But, then, these grand events are as important *now*, as they were *then*; as important to *me*, as they were to the persons who lived *then*, and actually witnessed them. But then, again, with what manner of attention and impression, should I now contemplate these wondrous transactions in the life, and at the death, of the divine Redeemer?"

Such reflections will bring reproach upon us, for that slightness of attention, and indifference of feeling, with which we are apt to read the wonderful events in the life of Christ; and will show, that we need to be excited to an effort and exercise of mind, to realize to ourselves more distinctly, forcibly, impressively, those memorable events and transac-

tions, when we read the account of them. We should endeavour, for the time, to constrain our utmost attention to the scene placed before us ; strive to place ourselves, in thought, as if there ; pointedly observe the circumstances ; conceive how we might or ought to have felt, if we could have been actual witnesses ; think how insensate it would have been—what very stones we should have been, if wonder had not seized us,—if instruction had not beamed into our spirits,—if love and admiration of the great Wonder-worker had not filled our minds. In such a serious effort, and not forgetting to implore the divine influence, we should often find, that any one of the great transactions would stand displayed before us in a stronger and more instructive light, than in the too ordinary manner of their passing before us.

Let us, for a few moments, try to exemplify this in the instance of the short narration we began by reading. It is given with that unrivalled simplicity which pervades all the evangelic history, and which was befitting the historians of Him who spake and acted in a manner quite distinct from that of any other that ever dwelt on earth. It is such a manner of relating, as leaves those who can impute contrivance, fiction, and imposture, no pretension to *honesty*, except at the cost of losing all pretension to *perception*.

Our Lord had just performed one mighty miracle, that of feeding five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes,—a miracle, in one view, of a more palpably direct, immediate, and decided character,

than even the descent of the manna in the wilderness ; that is to say, there was more plainly no room (if we may so express it) for the divine agency to interpose the operation of any natural cause, as we are accustomed to call it. Not that, in the case of the manna, it is possible, in the smallest degree, to conceive of any natural cause that could intervene ; but there was, at least, much more space of time for an operation on the material elements, and the effect was not brought so directly under human observation. Here, in the case of our Lord's miracle, the fact was, plainly, under the immediate sight of a vast multitude of people, that a certain small quantity of bread and fish was, within one hour, an immensely greater quantity. This done, the multitudes were sent away.

Now, after such a transaction, how long, would it be thought, might the Performer of such amazing works, intermit, and, as it were, repose from, his mighty operations ? Beholding him as a *man*, amidst this stupendous agency, we might have had a transient feeling as if he should subside, for a while, into quiescence,—take some time to enjoy, for a space, the glory and the triumph, and receive, in a dignified inactivity, the honours due from the people, as the performers of grand worldly exploits did. But no ; we feel no surprise, to see him, a few hours afterwards, giving another display of his sublime power, in a quite different manner.

Reflect, here, what a tribute we involuntarily pay, (and, indeed, too often without consideration,) to his peculiar and glorious character. We take it as all

but in right order, quite natural, and almost of course, that he should perform prodigies of superhuman power, almost as the ordinary course of his action. We never think of him, as rising above himself in these mighty achievements, and then as subsiding down to the level of mortality and humanity, till a mighty power should come on him again, to raise him to meet some great and extraordinary occasion. We never think of him as needing to make his grand performances rare,—to give them an interval to collect the due admiration. Whence is this, but that we have a settled estimate, or, at least, impression of his character, as entirely different from that of any other visitant on earth, and transcendently superior? But here comes a perversity of our minds, namely, that we regard these astonishing works, in their crowded frequency, as so proper for him to do, and so easily and familiarly within his power, that we do not duly feel how marvellous they are. How ill-conditioned is the human spirit! If his mighty works had been but few, the sentiment would have been, that it had become such a being as the Messiah was predicted and professed to be, and come to the world on so awful and sublime a purpose, to have performed many more. But, on the contrary, they crowd upon us in rapid succession, and then,—they are only so appropriate to him and his grand office,—so natural, so much of course for *him* to perform, that we are the less sensible how wonderful they are in themselves! We want to see the energy of agonizing difficulty, and the pomp of display, to excite our admiration. But we are diverting from our immediate subject.

In the evening, the multitudes went away, and he constrained his disciples to enter into a ship, and to cross the Lake. How totally unaware were all they of what was luminously before his mind as to be transacted a few hours later !

One has often been struck with the idea of the *solitude* of our Lord's spirit. How many things incommunicable, of which there could be no mortal participator. What thoughts, what a profound consciousness, that could not be unfolded to any human intelligence. And how many things in his vision of the nearer and the remoter future, on which he chose to be silent. He was mysteriously and internally alone, whoever might be with him. In this instance he chose to be personally alone, and commanded the departure of his disciples.

It may be conceived that the dignity of our Lord's character required that sometimes all mortal society should retire from him ; that they should be made to feel, that he belonged not always to them ;—that he must sometimes have employments pre-eminently sacred, and withdrawn from all mortal witness or approach. He, therefore, sought the dark veil of deepest solitude, secluded in the loneliness of a desert mountain, and the shades of night. His employment there was prayer. In what strain we can never know, and should vainly conjecture. It is presumable that some of his prayers must have been of a nature infinitely peculiar,—totally different from all other prayer ever offered upon earth. With our belief in his divine nature, we are met by an idea of something mysterious and enigmatical in the fact of his praying.

It is almost inevitable to admit the thought, that some of his communications with the Almighty would be more expressly in that character, than such of his devotional expressions as are recorded to have been uttered in the hearing of his disciples. At all events, the solemnities of intercourse with the Deity formed an admirable conjunction between what he had done and what he was about to do,—a dignified employment of the interval. And on all accounts this worship was the sublimest and the purest that ever ascended from this earth to the Almighty. And it was a worship by One who had a world's eternal interests depending on him,—involved in what he did.

He could have remained all night in such occupation and such a desert. But another scene required his presence. His disciples might have wondered what his design could be, and when, and how, they should meet with him again. Though the Lake of Gennesaret (or “sea of Galilee,” or “sea of Tiberias”) was only five or six miles across, they had been, in their small vessel, labouring against adverse wind and water, many hours ; for it was now several hours after midnight. That they had not Him with them in the tempest, would augment their distress and dismay. They probably had not yet attained the faith that he could, absent, preserve them in defiance of the storm and the billows. While they were thus employed and alarmed, their attention was suddenly seized by something else than the storm, and which even made them insensible to the tumult of the raging elements.

Now, how important a faculty to us is Imagination,—and yet at best how feeble and deficient! We want to place ourselves in the condition of seeing, suddenly, this strange spectacle, which “*they all saw.*” Think of being in this vessel, in the midst of this commotion, and seeing a human figure, positively such, though with the indistinctness of the faint light of night or earliest dawn,—this figure walking over the surges, unaided by any solid support, perfectly at ease, with an entire command of its action!—a being that was on other terms with those elements than any frail mortal man—perfectly absolved from the laws under which all men are subjected to them. Think of such an apparition!

The emotion of the disciples would be heightened by perceiving that the portentous figure had them in view. They would apprehend that a power and an action so mysterious were directed, in some manner, on them. And their terror interpreted, that this form, and this action, came in awful alliance with the tempest. They probably imagined that they saw the very spirit of the storm—a power which actuated these elements to violence. In this object, therefore, they saw concentrated all that was alarming in the tempest,—insomuch that the tempest itself became secondary in their apprehension. Their irresistible impression was, that it was “*a spirit;*” a clear proof that it was the established popular belief that spirits sometimes made themselves visible to mortal eyes; (a persuasion that has prevailed over the whole world, and could not so have prevailed without a foundation in truth.) It is almost always a dreaded

phenomenon ; because we have no power over spirits, and they *may* have a fearful power over us.

The portentous figure, having approached the vessel, proceeded in a direction to go by and pass away. That indication might not give any relief to their fears. For their doom might but have been sealed by this fearful form having approached them, and looked upon them. He might be now passing away to leave them to their inevitable fate. Observe, in all this, what a decided impression there is on human minds that the beings of another world are their superiors. Not only heroes and philosophers have trembled at the apprehension, (and infidels and blasphemers too,) but the holiest men, and the greatest prophets, have felt an awful emotion at the sense of their presence. And it is well there should be this impression of the superiority of spirits, though it may often be mingled with superstition. "*He went*" (Mark says) "*as if he would have passed by them.*" He would thus give the completed proof that he was independent, and master of the element ; he needed not the ship,—was at home on the tempestuous deep.

He still, however, was very near, though not near enough for them to recognize his person. And when the terror of the disciples had reached the last point of human endurance, he kindly spoke to them (in a voice preternaturally strong, but which they knew)—"*It is I, be not afraid.*"

Shall we take this for an emblem, and divert to the observation, that we mortals, that our souls—in this sinful state and world, are involved in far more

formidable perils than those of a tempestuous sea,—and that we need just the same deliverer, in his loftier character of Redeemer. How necessary that men should become alarmed at their danger. And when they are so in genuine earnest, and cry out—He, the very same, says, “Be not afraid,—I am here.”

When he so spoke to the disciples, what delightful accents to be heard through the roar of the storm! And when all the terror was seized just in its full strength, and converted into grateful adoration—what an energy of piety! Peter was so elated, that he entreated to be called to meet his Lord on the waves. We may doubt, whether, in a person of cooler temperament, this request would not have been sinful. Christians should never seek extraordinary trials of their faith, when there is no duty to summon them. Their faith will *then* fail. And Peter incurred a practical rebuke of his hasty presumption on his faith; he was soon made to feel that it was far less than he had been confident it was. But this rebuke, both in fact and words, was accompanied by the mercy which stretched out a powerful hand to save him. It should have made him more cautious afterwards in his avowals, his too self-confident boastings, of what he would do and dare for his Master. “*O thou of little faith,*” he said. Observe, faith is proved to be very defective whenever creatures are more dreaded than the Sovereign Lord of all creatures is trusted.

He entered into the ship, as it appears, while the tempest was still raging. And never was the

intervention of a powerful friend and benefactor more welcome,—excepting (if we may once more turn the history into emblem) excepting when he comes to the soul under the terrors of guilt, or anticipating the terrors of death. But here, again, he changed their joy into an overwhelming amazement. They had just admitted the joyful hope that he would enable them to weather and escape the storm. But quite different from this; the consequence of his coming into the vessel was, that instantly there was a perfect calm, and the next moment they were miraculously brought to land. For John says, (vi. 21,) “*Immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.*” They were overwhelmed again. This appeared to them, too much, almost, to be believed. There is more than intimated a strong censure of this feeling; and observe, by one of themselves, that is, the relater,—“*For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened,*” (Mark vi. 52.) It is a charge of criminal dulness, and inaction of intellect. They would not have been so astonished, if they had properly reflected on the preceding miracle. Their having seen him exercise a power that could create, ought to have prepared them not to be amazed, to this almost incredulous degree, at the sight of a less demonstration of power.

But men are not creatures of thought and reflection. That which is connected with tumult and material magnificence, and where there is a mighty impression on the senses, strikes them as greater than a calmer phenomenon, in which thought

and wisdom may perceive still sublimer evidence of greatness and power.

However, it ended right ; for they worshipped him as "*truly the Son of God*," with a conviction, a solemnity, and an ardour, which we may well believe would have expected hardly less than the lightnings of Heaven to fall on any one who should have dared to deny it. He accepted, as in every such instance he did, this worship, by this solemn title. He went on land, was recognized by the people, ("*straightway they knew him*," that is, he was known,) and, in prosecution of his grand commission and career, proceeded to new labours, new instructions to illuminate the people, and new miracles to convince them.

LECTURE XXVI.

SIN MANIFESTED BY THE LAW.

ROMANS vii. 13.

“ That sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”

IN the natural world which we inhabit, there are several grand material elements constantly presenting themselves to our senses, in their various modes, combinations, and effects. Now, these elements are good and beneficent, adapted to a vast utility and actually effecting it ; that is, essentially and generally so, notwithstanding that disorders and certain special combinations among them are pernicious and destructive.

But in what we call the *moral* world there is an element which is absolutely, intrinsically, and wholly, and always, *bad*. Its very name, is, with emphasis, EVIL ; we call it also *vice*, *depravity*, *wickedness*, and, in religious language, it is named SIN,—a name which the world has a great dislike to—partly because it is the name which GOD gives to the evil. Our calling it an *element* may rightly, perhaps, be excepted against, on the ground that it is not a *substantive*, independent thing, but merely a *result*,

an *effect* of the disorder and perversion of the human faculties and passions ; we only mean that it is a mighty and permanent *reality* in the moral world ; there is nothing that more certainly, absolutely, constantly, does exist ; not earth, mountains, rocks, ocean, fire. Its existence is perceived, in some degree, by all mankind, however dull or perverted their apprehensions. They are aware there is something else than *goodness* in the world. A large proportion of them can perceive its quality, as an evil, when it is exhibited in its most gross and striking forms,—in great crimes,—in flagrant wrongs. But to apprehend, in any due measure, its extreme malignity, in its *own nature*, in whatever form it may exist and operate, would seem to be a rare attainment of humanity. A full and perfect apprehension is the attainment of no man on earth. Sin infects the very judgment which is to estimate it.

But, nothing is of more essential interest and necessity, than that there *should* be a clear, deep, comprehensive understanding of the *quality of sin*, and a strong and alarming *impression* of it, because fatal consequences are involved in an insensibility to that quality. For then the evil will have an unresisted power over the man. To dwell here, as spirits surrounded, invaded, penetrated by this element, being at the same time naturally disposed to yield to its operation,—and not to be aware of its quality,—what can this be less than to be liable to its whole deadly effect on the soul ? The man, not aware what a dreadful serpent he has to deal with,—

being easy in its presence, playing with it,—will certainly be stung, poisoned, destroyed.

But, then, *in what way* are men to be apprised of the quality of sin? It may be said, that all men may and must be, through the mere perceptions of common sense, in some general manner, apprised of it, by seeing what dreadful mischief sin does; how it disorders and plagues the world,—destroys happiness,—renders men "*hateful and hating one another*,"—causes all over the world an outcry of wrong and suffering. And, certainly, this is an inevitable instruction. They cannot but say, "*an enemy hath done this*." But this will give them but a crude and limited apprehension of sin. There would be wanting still a Revealer of the *dark depth* of the evil. The grand effectual mean is signified in the text: "*by the commandment*."

It is the *Divine Law*, amply and spiritually apprehended, that must expose the malignity of sin,—displaying the essential nature and principle of "*that abominable thing*," (making the true devil stand confest,) while it names or defines, generally and in detail, the things that are sin,—the practical forms which it takes in doing its mischief among the creatures of God. *The Law of God*.—We cannot conceive of the sovereign Creator and Governor of the world as not appointing a law to his intelligent creatures: that he should be what the Epicureans accounted of their gods, perfectly careless about the world, and what may be done in it. As the Maker of creatures who are to be wholly and for ever dependent on him, he must necessarily have

them under his sovereign authority. He must, also, necessarily, have a *will* with respect to the state of the dispositions, and the order of actions, of his intelligent creatures. And he must perfectly *know what is right* for them. He would, therefore, as at once the Supreme Authority, and the Infallible Intelligence, prescribe to his creatures a *Law* of injunction and prohibition. He would do so, except on one supposition, namely, that he had willed to constitute his rational creatures such, that they must, necessarily, always be disposed, and always act, *right*,—by the infallible propensity of their nature,—by their own unalterable, eternal choice ; so that there could be no possibility of their going wrong, from either inclination or mistake. In that case, there would be no need, perhaps, of a formal law ; a constitution so essentially and unalienably conformed to the divine will might have been its own law. But the Almighty did *not* so constitute any natures that we know anything of. It is proved by fact, that they were constituted under a possibility of choosing wrong. Even angels could err and fall. Therefore a law is appointed,—a grand rule of discrimination and obligation. And, as to the quality and extent of that law, proceeding from a perfectly holy Being, it could not do less than prescribe a perfect holiness in all things. Think of the absurdity there is in the idea that its requirements should be less than perfect holiness. For, that *less*,—what would it be ? What would or could the *remainder* be *after* holiness up to a certain point, and stopping there ? It must be *not* holiness, just so far. *Not*

holiness? and what must it be then? What *could* it be, but something *unholy*, wrong, sinful? Thus, a law, not requiring *perfect* rectitude, would, *so far*, give an allowance, a *sanction*, to what is evil,—to *sin*. And from HIM, who is perfectly and infinitely holy!—an utter absurdity to conceive!

And again, a law from such an Author will not, and cannot, reduce and accommodate itself to an imperfect, fallen, and incapable state of those on whom it is imposed. Man is sunk into a condition in which it is entirely impossible for him to conform perfectly to a perfect law. What then? Must the supreme and most holy Governor degrade and conform his law to that depraved state; and, exacting no more than just what an imperfect fallen creature can perform, *allow* and *sanction* all the vast amount of *unholiness* beyond? So that a strong indisposition to the right, and disposition to the wrong, should become a clear acquittance? Then would the greatest depravity confer the amplest privilege of exemption. And an intense and perfect aversion to all holiness, as constituting the greatest inability to conform to the Divine Law, would constitute very nearly a perfect innocence. Satan would be let free from punishment. For it is innocent *not* to do, or be, what the Divine Law does *not* require; and the notion we speak of is, that the Divine Law *does not demand more than the depraved creature can perform,—can*, in that state of disablement produced by depravity.

Beware, then, of that most pernicious delusion, very popularly taught and entertained, that the law

of God *limits* its requirement to the narrow ability of the imperfect, depraved creature.

The economy of *Mercy* is quite another matter. *That* reveals a possibility of *pardon* to the creature's failure of conformity to the Divine Law; but it pardons the *failure as guilt*,—as obligation violated. It does not come as an indulgent excuse for inability. While it absolves the sinner, it pronounces, in solemn terms, the criminality,—thus affirming the *entireness* of the obligation, that is, of the undiminished, perfect requirement of the law.

And look into the sacred volume, and see whether the law *has* been lowered and accommodated to man's imperfection. Does it resign, in the New Testament itself, any point or particle of an universal jurisdiction? Does the New Testament say, that the compassion of God, manifested through Christ, has been shown in lessening the extent of duty. or in making failure to be no sin?—Can we conceive *how* the law could be more high, and comprehensive, and perfect, even if man were now in a state of perfect rectitude to obey it? Supposing that he had recovered that state, would a higher standard then be proclaimed? Wherein could it be higher? Now, it is this law, clearly and solemnly manifested and apprehended, that exposes the true quality of sin,—shows it to be exceeding *sinful*—(its own name being the worst word that could be found to express its quality.) And, in this reference, it is most important for us to be profoundly instructed in the Divine Law. Let us often contemplate it, as the irrevocable, unalterable declaration of God's own

judgment of good and evil, (fixed in light over the world like the sun in the firmament, the same from the world's first day to the last ;) a judgment which he will infallibly enforce, in one manner or other, throughout the universe ; so that either it shall be conformed to by his creatures, or everything unconformed shall incur his displeasure. Let us observe, how peremptory and absolute it is, in all its demands ; it is not an advice, a pleading, a persuasion,—the *Gospel* indeed pleads, persuades—but the *Law* decisively dictates. What an uniform, consistent, spirit pervades it all ; it never gives the idea as if the Great Lawgiver were in different dispositions, or had different purposes, at different times. With what an *emphasis* it pronounces condemnation,—so strong as to bear the denomination of curses. How wide its comprehension,—so that no one at any moment ever can say, “now here, at this instant, I am under no accountableness to God.” To what specific minuteness it carries its authoritative interference ; look at all the *branchings* of the great precepts. How expressly and formally it asserts its jurisdiction of the *inner* man,—it suffers no apartment in the soul to be closed against it—consumes the door, as with lightning, that would shut it out. How high is the nature, the grand principle, of its demands ; (our Lord's brief comprehensive abstract). How sovereignly *exclusive* it assumes its authority to be ; it says, “Whoever shall dare to utter opposing dictates, let him take the consequences.” How *impartially* it extends its jurisdiction to all men ; it is “*no respecter of persons.*”

Now, let such apprehensions of the Divine Law be

intelligently fixed and habitual in the mind, and accompanied by devotional feeling,—and *then, how will sin appear?* What a sad spectacle, when we look abroad over this great world by the light of this law shining down from heaven, displaying the innumerable deformed shapes of sin! What an awful *retrospect* of all past time! When we behold the law, as it were, resting upon all past sin; the malediction remaining fixed on it inseparably,—like deeply cut inscriptions on eternal monuments! And what a *prospect*—when we look forward to the *end*, and in that vision behold the holy law casting its glare on the assembled account of the sins of all time. When the presence of the Righteous Lawgiver himself shall give new intensity to the force and flame of that law. Who will then be willing to own his sins?

This law—if it could suddenly lighten on the minds of the “*fools*” that are making “*a mock at sin*,”—what fearful amazement! The object of their gaiety would instantly change in their sight, and assume a terrifying aspect. The loose, vague, indulgent notions of the evil of sin, which men thoughtlessly entertain in their own favour,—the slight estimates,—the easy palliations,—how would these be exploded and annihilated by a luminous manifestation of that law! Conscience would rise up, incensed to have been so trifled with and beguiled. There is, in the world’s society, a certain conventional standard, a fashionable estimate of sin,—how instantly and violently this would be dashed to the earth, if there were a general manifestation to men’s minds of the sovereign Law! They

would be amazed to find what a wretched league they had been in to delude one another and themselves. What is the testimony given by any individual, who has been a thoughtless, or perhaps a self-righteous, sinner, when he is stricken and awakened by the Spirit of God,—when the law is arrayed before him, in its holiness, and his sins are brought to his view in the light of that law?

And this is no delusion of affrighted fancy,—no superstitious exaggeration. Even after he has obtained peace of conscience, by the hope of pardon, through faith in Jesus Christ, his sins do not appear extenuated to his view, nor that law less awfully bright in holiness.

The law exposes “*the exceeding sinfulness of sin,*” by constraining us to behold it, in some degree, in the same light that God does. It is as if he said, “place yourselves with ME to look at it,”—as if we were called to approach him on Sinai. It exposes the sinfulness of it, by declaring what is the *principle* of *harmony* with infinite excellence,—and showing us how, by sin, that principle is rejected, scorned and violated—(the sinner practically saying, “I do not care for his love—*let me be an alien and a stranger*”)—by making it palpably manifest that sin is absolutely nothing less than rebellion against the Almighty. This is a fact reluctantly acknowledged by sinners, and, indeed, never suspected by many of them; they say, “We have no enmity to God—we do not *wish* to oppose him,—we only *will not obey him!*” But what is *that*?

The law serves to manifest the hateful and

dreadful quality of sin in this way,—namely, by giving so definite a model of holiness, in a creature, that it enables us *distinctly to conceive the character realized*,—and thus gives us a palpable form of true sanctity, *for direct full contrast with the sinful being*.

The law operates to the same effect also in *this* way,—namely ; it solemnly tells and shows us, that all holiness, all excellence,—is but *merely* DUTY, *and no more* ; thus expelling a notion, very apt to be cherished, that eminent and consummate holiness, supposing it attained, would be something *above* the standard,—something mounting to *supererogation*. According to which notion, sin would appear less flagrantly evil and abominable, being judged of by its distance below a *lower line*, if we may so express it. But, behold the Divine Law making the high superlative line of *perfect* holiness, as that which is *but* the pitch of the creature's duty—*but* the level of its *proper* state, and then sin will be beheld in its true and awful distance from *that* line.

There is yet one more way in which the law contributes to evince the malignant quality of sin ; namely,—it irritates into hostile activity the corrupt principles in the soul, somewhat like the case of the demoniacs in the presence of our Lord. These principles might have their dwelling and operation there, in a certain kind of deadly calm, if let alone ; but let their mortal opposite come near them, and then they are provoked to re-action and rage. Rebels left undisturbed may settle into a comparative quiet ; but when the rightful claimant to authority approaches, they instantly rush to arms. Thus the law brings

out sin in its true character,—resisting to be subdued. This is, perhaps, what the apostle means, “*When the commandment came, sin revived.*”

Again,—it is the law that denounces the punishment of sin, and *thus* it exposes its true nature and aggravation. It pronounces awful maledictions on transgression. It proclaims “Sin,—all sin,—this sin, deserves the wrath of God, and will subject the sinner to the penal infliction—*unless*,” &c. But, at the same time, God is perfectly righteous. Sin, therefore, does really deserve what he has threatened in his law ; therefore, how intensely evil must be the nature of sin !

It will suffice to add one observation more. The law says nothing of *remission*, of the pardon of sin. Though the law proceeds from a Being of infinite goodness, that goodness did not introduce into it *mitigations*,—hints of possible suspension of punishment,—suggestions of escape,—“*a door of hope.*” No ; the *goodness* of God approved that his law should speak in the strict and exclusive language of *justice* ; would not, by any intimations of a possible absolution, give ground for a surmise that the law was too rigid, either in its injunctions or penalties. There was to be nothing in the law to allow a dubious estimate of sin. Sin was left to the pure justice of the law, to be manifested in its “*exceeding sinfulness.*”

In all such ways does the law expose the quality of sin. And thus exposed, how does it appear, in the view of an enlightened and serious mind—a mind recovered from blindness and insensibility ? The

most dreadful monster in the creation ;—as black and horrid as heaven is bright and beautiful—gone forth to work ruin and destruction ;—a thing in deadly hostility to all goodness and happiness ;—a thing which infuses a mortal poison into human souls ;—a thing so hateful, that the beings who can love it, and choose it, *deserve* the fearful consequences denounced by the holy law.

We conclude with an observation or two, to enforce the necessity of our having the true quality of sin thus exposed to us. Without it, we shall have but faint apprehensions even of the Divine Holiness. We cannot apprehend it otherwise than in an *emanation from his mind*, made visible in that model which he has exhibited here for his creatures. Without it, we can have no right conception of the state in which sinful beings stand before God. They actually stand before him in the whole guilt and condemnation of every thing in which they have been unconformed to every part of his law. But unless they are aware of that law, and how it judges, there can be no acquiescent conviction of their consciences, *approving* the Divine condemnation and judgments. The sentiment will be, —“Why such awfulness of denunciation ? Why words that burn ? Why does heaven seem to be moved, and earth menaced with destruction ?” Without it, there can be no adequate sentiments of humiliation and repentance ; self-love will protest against *too much* self-abasement, and ignorance of the Divine Law will support it by making little of the offences. There can be no right disposition of the soul toward

the grand Economy of Mercy,—the appointment of Jesus Christ. The importance and value of the Redeemer's intervention, and of his work altogether, can be but in proportion to the necessity in the condition of man. That necessity consists in the guilt of man, and his condemnation. And it is the law alone that gives the measure, the greatness of that guilt and condemnation. Therefore, without a knowledge of the law, there can be no competent understanding or impression of the importance, the nature, the process of *sanctification*,—that is, of obtaining the prevalence, in the heart and the life, of that which God requires and approves ; there can be no clear conception maintained of *what that is*, but by habitually looking at the holy model—the divine authority. Without this, a vast measure of evil may be left undisturbed—even unsuspected. There will be no high aspirings. Without this knowledge, we shall not be apprised what manner of conflict we have to maintain, as long as we stay on earth,—not aware that the things to be opposed are so many,—that failure would be so fatal,—that so much aid and strength from heaven is absolutely indispensable. Without it, in short, we can have no worthy estimate of the magnitude of the whole operative system of Divine Grace, or of any part of it ; and no right conception of *the happiness of heaven*. What can be conceived to be the most essential element of that happiness ? Imagine, that in one spirit placed among the blest, there could be one unholy disposition, of however diminutive a proportion, however profoundly latent,—*what would*

be the effect? A principle or an action of the mind, in *contrariety* to the glorious Supreme Spirit, and to the pure and blessed temper of all the society,—what *must* be the effect? A violent collision and shock,—an intense, intolerable sense of disharmony, of sympathy destroyed,—of being cut off from the celestial union, and a necessary expulsion from that divine community.

Men, in general, seem little sensible of the absolute incompatibility of sin with the happiness of heaven. But let them deeply and solemnly meditate the holy LAW ;—let them see how it exposes the black and malignant quality of *sin*,—and demonstrates how impossible it is, that with one particle of *that* retained, a soul can unite in the harmony, or enjoy the bliss, of heaven.

LECTURE XXVII.

ROBBERY OF GOD.

MALACHI iii. 8.

“ Will a man rob God ? ”

THE ordinance of God has been that men should have certain things, on certain conditions, belonging to them severally, as their own. But there has always been a mighty propensity to break through this great law. This has been the grand grievance and mischief, through all time and everywhere,—among all orders of men, each in their own way,—monarchs among the rest. To restrain it, by fear of punishment, has been a chief object of human law-making ; and with very imperfect success, as we know too well. What would the condition of society be, if there were no such laws, and if in no other way punishment were to be apprehended ? We do not at all wonder at this disposition and practice, with respect to property, as among men. But here, in the text, is another kind of robbery, which does sound strangely ; of which many may be guilty, and little think of it.

“ Rob God ! ”—it might be said—“ who could

ever think of a thing so monstrous?—the very idea, the very words, are horrid. If that crime could be committed, what would it deserve? But how can it be?” Yet it seems it can be,—for the next words are, “But ye *have* robbed *me*.” True enough, there is no ascending to heaven on such an enterprise. Not Satan himself with all his dreadful army, (the black legions who once were there,) can do that. How much less, if this were worth saying, any daring miserable rebels of the mortal tribe! But, indeed, what is there in heaven that wicked men could wish to take? Why, they will not take the trouble to *ask* from heaven the very best things that are there! Nay, they will not even have them given,—offered, and offered in vain.

But we are to be reminded that heaven is not the only domain of God’s vast property. All here on earth belongs to him as well. And so, it is in the midst of things belonging to him that we are conversant, living and acting. Look and see what there is that does not belong to him; with no mark on it to tell, so that, “We may do what we will with this, without any regard to him.” But now, if all belongs to God, then comes in the liability to commit robbery against him. For, it may be, that there shall be no general habitual sense and acknowledgment of his sovereign claims; no feeling that all does so belong. This is the comprehensive spirit and principle of the wrong toward him, and will go into many special forms; this state of mind is a general refusal to acknowledge his law; it says to him, “Do not thou interfere with us here. Do not be telling

us that this and that, anything, everything, belongs to thee. Be content to insist on thy rights,—thy dues,—somewhere else,—in heaven,—anywhere but here. Here we are in a place that is our own ;—and we *will* have it our own way ;—let not a foreign hand be laid on the things.” This is taking, as it were, the whole ground at once from God, and assuming a licence for every particular act and kind of robbery. Under the predominance of this spirit, it does not signify what one kind, specifically, he may tell us he has a right to ; there is one answer for all cases. As if a man had obtained wrongful possession of a tract of land, and the person whose right it was should assert his right at one time to a particular building on it, at another to a fruit-tree, a well, &c. —the usurper would say, “I shall not contest about *this* particular, and *that*—I refuse the *whole* claim.”

Coming to a more particular account of what may justly be called “*robbing God*,” we may say that it is so, for anything to be suffered to have a stronger power over us than his will, so that, *that* shall have from us what his will obtains not ; whether it be our own inclinations,—or the opinions of men,—or the spirit, customs, example, of the world. These are strong powers ; and are sure to array themselves, in many instances, against the will of God. In a particular case, his will is declared ;—requires so and so. “No ;” says one of these evil powers, “not so, it shall be *thus*.” Which do we obey ? “Not so ;” in another case, says another of them. These are plainly in a conspiracy that we shall “*rob*” him. The question is, do we agree with them,—yield to

them ? if we do, we take on ourselves the guilt of robbery ;—the guilt of all the wrongs to God which these incite us to.

There should be conscientious care to form a right, honest judgment, of what is due, of what belongs, to God. This estimate cannot be made out in the same exact manner as the appointments under the Jewish economy, the thing referred to in the text ; nothing in them was left to deliberation. But in our case there requires a serious, sincere exercise of thought ;—such thinking (in point of grave and patient attention) as an intelligent, upright, worldly man would employ on some important affair to be adjusted between himself and another party. We are to consider, that we *are* nothing, and *have* nothing, but from him ; whether so much, or so much, of any kind of service would really be too much to give to him, —(why too much ?)—whether that measure, where perhaps our inclination would stop, would not be too little ;—would it not, let conscience honestly say. What says the Divine Word ? what say the best examples ? Thus the sincere mind may come to a judgment as to what it is that it would be robbing God to withhold from him.

It hardly needs be added, that this guilt is incurred by misapplying to other uses what is due to him. As if a Jew, of whom, on any occasion, a slain beast was required, as a burnt offering, had said (and *done* so), “ Why not, instead, use it in the sustenance of my family ;—or in hospitality to my friends,—or give it to the poor and needy ? ”

But a few plain particulars should be specified of

what we cannot withhold from God without this guilt. One, plainly at first sight is, a very considerable proportion of *thought* concerning Him. What an amazing multitude of thoughts passing in and out of the mind! Thousands, perhaps, in a single day! It is a duty to see to them, what they are about; many of them come independently of will; yet the will has a large power and responsibility, for we can think of what we choose. To a great extent, the thinking is necessitated by things to be done; but, after all, there remains a great deal just for voluntary choice. And here, how much is due to God? to him who has given the very power of thinking? Is a *little* thinking,—a slight occasional thought—enough? how should it, in all reason, be enough? Such thinking implies that the subject (in any case) is indifferent or insignificant; at least to us. Look at the small proportion of thought about God, and then ask, what is the greatest, strongest reason for thinking of anything? Look at it, and consider, is this in any proportion to what God is? to the fact of his intimate constant presence? Is it in any due proportion to what he has said to us? to what we depend on him for? to what we deserve from him? to what we shall receive from him? if quite the contrary, then we “*rob God.*”

Fear, of the deepest, most solemn kind, is due to God. We have, naturally, an awe of power; to feel none of it, in the presence of the greatest conceivable earthly power, would be deemed (if, indeed, it were possible) rather as stupidity than courage. But what is the right habit of feeling toward a Power

to which all other power, all in the universe, is nothing?—a power awfully holy, at the same time, in nature and in requirement. Will, then, a diminutive, frail, sinful, creature say (in effect);—“Even so; here, nevertheless, is an impregnable being that trembles not,—a fortified breast, invaded by no awful emotions,—cool, intrepid, undismayed, while almighty energy is in action all around it,—as a rock proudly standing up in a boundless ocean, regardless of the will, the sanctity, the commands, the threatenings, of the Infinite Power,—making no account of his long forbearance to destroy,—indifferent to all consequences, or rather, braving them.” “*Rob God!*” Why, that is the faintest description; it is to *defy!* How frightful to consider, that this, more than all this, can express, or feebly shadow out, is the actual condition of innumerable minds all around us.

But, there are other tributes due, corresponding to what we may call the more attractive and gracious attributes. “*Will a man*” refuse the gentler affections—*love, gratitude, humble reliance?* These affections are to be given,—to go out,—to something. And are they just to go out to a few inferior objects close around us, and stop there, quite absorbed? Do they there lose their warmth and force of emanation, so that they can go no further? Is it that the immense greatness of the divine goodness, beneficence, kindness, mercy, chills them, repels them? Do they shrivel and wither under such a glorious sunshine? Is it, then, to the perfect excellence, the supreme goodness, the transcendent beauty, that the soul of man is to be indifferent and insensible?

What, to love something, must it be of a low and little nature, imperfect, uncertain, unsatisfactory, and even tainted with sin ? or, must it be *sin*, its very self ? Oh, it is a sad and most hateful condition of our nature !

As to the claim to *gratitude*,—let a man think what one single day's care of God over him is worth ; and, to judge of it, let him imagine, if he can, the suspension, the withdrawment, nay for one moment, and the consequences ! There would be an instant rush into ruin—into nothing ; no time for him to catch, in falling, at the aid of any inferior supporter ; he would be precipitated down and perish. The divine instruction has been sent to him ; what is that worth ? One expression, one token, of mercy to him as a sinner, what is that worth ? One gracious promise to him, as a feeble, endangered, mortal creature ; what is that worth ? But, then, the collective value of the whole of all these things ! And will he refuse the due of gratitude ?

There is, again, the sense, and the habit that should be maintained in exercise, of *dependence* on God. A man (suppose) has to make a very long journey, through a region he has never traversed. He says, “ What have I to reckon and depend upon ? What are my means to start with ? What will be my resting places when tired ? What my shelter in case of storms ? What guides shall I have when in intricacy or perplexity ? What means of defence in perils ? How I do wish I had some friendly, sagacious, courageous, person, to go with me ! ” Now, here is the condition of our journey through this

world ; and, in this dangerous enterprise, God claims to be acknowledged and sought to, as our all-sufficient guardian. What shall we say to him ? for we must, that is, practically, answer something. He is to be acknowledged or disowned, as the great Patron, Protector, and Guide. Do we say,—“No ; we can bestow our confidence more desirably. It is too much to be under the continual necessity of having recourse to Him, so that we are not to plan, calculate, pursue, or even hope, but in dependence on him, with invocation of him ;—it will be so much interference. His offering himself as our aid and protector is but, in another form, insisting on being acknowledged our Master. It will involve an interdict, a refusal, to us, a recourse to some other kinds of assistance. We shall not be allowed the privilege, taken by those foreigners planted in Samaria, who worshipped the Lord and sought to their own gods. Why may not our own understanding and ability be competent ? And we may trust we shall not want for friends. We see people do obtain much good in the world without this constant reference and recourse to God ; and why should not we ? If there are to be difficulties, grievances, afflictions in life, why, we will hope for the best for encountering them. And, at last of all, no doubt we may do wisely, when everything else fails, to have recourse to the help and the mercy of God.”

Now all this is flagrantly to “*rob God.*”

But we have to look further, at the full breadth of the declared law of God ; the comprehensive sum of his commands ; a grand scheme of the dictates of

the divine will, placed peremptorily before us, and abiding there, as permanently as our view of the surface of the earth, or the starry sky. Literally so, as our Lord declares, "*Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law.*" But, unhappily, we are so apt to view this as only something *without* us ; not feeling, emphatically, that it is something *within* us ; that is, the rights, the claims of God in us, to that whole extent. This, if seriously reflected on, warns us to what an extent we are liable to "*rob God.*" For each and every precept tells of something we may refuse him, namely, the obedience ; and a temptation stands close by each. Each one, making the demand for him of something in us, seems also to say, "Wilt thou deny him ?" Another, and another, still speaks in the same authoritative tone. But oh ! then, what an amount of wrong we may commit, and be convicted of, against the greatest Being, and the best !

There are some that seem to "*rob God*" of nearly all. And with so determined a will, that there would seem but to need some more precepts (if that might be), for them to extend their injustice.

Others, not so bold in this wrong, think they must render *something*, but that a partial tribute, and a small one, may suffice. They wish to have something to allege to him, in proof that they do, in some way, acknowledge his rights. As in the case of some legal contracts, where there is to be some trifling, nominal, payment, merely as acknowledgment — a pepper-corn rent. And this partial acknowledgment, so rendered, will probably be, in those points of

obedience, where there is the least of effort, of sacrifice, or of temptation, to the contrary. And a kind of mock-humility may be saying, in excuse—"Why, all we could or can do were most imperfect, and partial, and little at the best, and surely the difference cannot be essentially important between *a little*, and *a little less*." At the same, that same little that is rendered (and least inconvenient to render) will be highly magnified.

Many appear to think that if they do not rob men (if they render to them what is due), there needs not much care about what is specially and directly due to God. As if they should say, "This (to men) is care and trouble enough in all reason ;" or, "nothing can really be given to Him,—or be called deprivation if withheld ;—no injury can be inflicted. He wants nothing from any of his creatures. To his greatness and happiness, anything that men can render or withhold, would not be the fraction of an atom,—would be infinitely less than a small cottager's tax to the revenue of a mighty monarch."

This would be simply to deny and explode the essential principle of the relation in which a dependent creature must *eternally* stand to its Creator, Preserver, Benefactor.

But, at the same time, let it be remembered that it is not for his own sake (in any sense intelligible to us) that God requires our homage, service, and obedience. It is for our sake ; because all the things he requires will be for our good, here or hereafter, not only because he will so, but by the nature of the case. To be conformed to the will of God,—to be

delighted in performing services to him,—to be animated with the love of holiness, and all that is good, and hatred of sin,—this would be to be happy (in heaven itself)—therefore required.

And thus it will come to be found, that in *robbing God*, men iniquitously and fatally rob themselves. De-luded mortals ! they imagine it is to be just so much gain to themselves ! and in a certain, immediate, but disastrous sense, it is so. In refusing obedience to a divine precept, they do gain, whatever gratification there can be in the sin ; as, no doubt, the forbidden fruit tasted deliciously to our first parents. The time, that might be employed in serious thought, devout worship, they have for amusements, &c. The application of money—we mean of such portion of it as would rightfully belong to God, and is robbed from him, either by vain or vicious expenditure, or by parsimonious, insatiable accumulation. *Such* profit is there of robbing God ; but how will the matter be found when it comes to the account ? Take along this consideration, that which God has been robbed of by them, he cannot have for them, as a treasure in heaven, of the offerings and services sent up to him from faithful servants here below. It will have sunk into the earth, or gone to the winds, or been given to the Great Enemy.

After thus insisting on the preceptive economy we are under,—on law, duty, obedience, is it necessary to introduce a caution against *legality* ? against the pharisaic notion of merit in rendering to God what is due to him ? If it be, there is, instantly at hand, the observation, that self-righteousness is a flagrant

robbery of God. In matters of duty and obedience, we have to approach him, so to speak, on the side of justice, and it is, with so miserably imperfect an obedience at the best, that a claim for justification advanced upon it would be repelled by that justice, and blasted as with flames ;—then, for acceptance, solely on the side of mercy, as manifested to us in the mediation of Christ. This is announced to us in every possible form of emphatic declaration. Then, a legal, self-righteous, claim for acceptance and justification, how does it bear on the mercy of God ? It plainly tells him he shall not have the glory of saving by pure mercy,—shall not receive our grateful acknowledgments of free, superabounding grace,—that we know better than to ascribe such an effusion of goodness to him. It tells our Lord and Saviour that the lofty language of the gospel concerning his great work, ought to be abased,—that he must be satisfied with a very limited gratitude, inasmuch as we could *nearly* do without him. Now, this would be the most fatal conjunction of the two kinds of robbery—of God, and of ourselves.

But then, again, there is the same wrong against God in an opposite form ; that is, when men take advantage of grace and mercy to exempt themselves from the obligations of duty, as dictated by the divine law. As if they should say, “ If we are to pay such large tribute to the attribute of mercy, we will balance it, by withholding that to justice ;—it is too much, equally to honour two attributes ;—by the one attribute being satisfied, the other should be silenced ;—or, if it presume to speak to us of duty,

we will reply by alleging free-grace." But, from what cause was the grand intervention of grace, in the appointment of the Mediator? Why? But because there had been a fearful breach of the divine law; for remedy of which—that so awful a fact should not be permitted to pass, as if in defiance of God—a new and amazing kind of interposition was absolutely necessary. And shall this very mediation, appointed for this very reason, be perverted to the horrid purpose of abrogating the authority of that very law?

But to come to an end. We mentioned, in very general terms, some things as due to God; to specify particulars were endless; but we will name *one* (as bearing on the object of our present meeting), that is, *the duty of promoting the cause of God in the world*. That cause being in the world, there is, in *His* estimate (in which he cannot be mistaken), some certain amount of what is due from men, in promotion of it—due, therefore, to Him. Now, it might be a formidable revelation, if He were to declare that amount, and then set it against what is rendered. And if each professed servant of God and follower of Christ could be supposed to be asked,—“Will you have your individual part of the statement set before you?” he must be a bold man who should, instantly, and free from all apprehension, say, “Yes, I am sure of what it will testify.” For instance, a man who sees that religious good, in his neighbourhood, might be done by him, in various ways, or *one way*, if he had zeal, activity, liberality, &c. A man who sees worthy attempts—commenced trials to do

good, struggling, almost sinking under difficulties which he could effectually aid. A man who, if he could be content with less of state, and show, and style, in his mode of life, might afford much to the good cause. A man who is economically and successfully saving, and thinks he may as well save God's share with the rest ; or even does not recollect that any accounts are kept in heaven. We hardly need specify, a quite opulent man, continually augmenting his wealth ; but, though a professed Christian, regarding the slenderest outgoings, for the cause of God, as quite enough. One has come in the way of knowing, here and there, divers such individuals,—members of Christian churches,—punctual in attendance on ordinances,—(“fills up his place,”)—very regular in their conduct,—free from the ordinary and external vices,—but, while perfectly well known to be vastly rich, not less notorious for niggardly parsimony in their contributions to the cause of God—plainly “*robbers of God.*” *Now, I cannot pretend to know much of the right formation and discipline of churches, but it does always appear to me, that there must be something very unsound in the constitution of a church that retains such a member.* They are expected, and justly so, to exercise discipline in various things very censurable, but not of the worst kind, (great imprudences, temporary lapses under sudden temptation or provocation, injurious actions of a minor degree, &c.) But here is a great flagrant IDOLATER in their communion, who might just as well go on his knees, and literally worship his gold and silver, if put in the form of an image. (His objec-

tion to have it put in that form would be that it would pay "*no interest!*" yet he would affect to admire Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego!—and it would be thought a fanatical excess to rise up and assert that he is no fit member.

But, however, we have no great number of "*passing rich*" men in our dissenting societies; and must mainly depend on persons of moderate (some of them very moderate) means. The claims come, indeed, very often,—the stronger needs to be the impression *whose* claims they are, and the assurance that though men can give to God "*only of what is his own,*" yet he accepts it, less as the payment of a debt, than as a free tribute of love to him. For it is remarkable that every form of generous language is employed by him. There is, then, a certainty that what is given to his cause will be, on the whole account, no loss. What men, in a pure spirit, render to God, will come back to them here, or meet them hereafter, in a manner to testify that their Lord has not forgotten.

And, as the "*gifts of God are without repentance,*" so will the "*gifts to God be without repentance.*"

LECTURE XXVIII.

THE LOVE OF MONEY.

1 TIMOTHY vi. 10.

“The love of money is the root of all evil.”

THE analogy between the evil things in the natural and in the moral world has some exceptions. One is suggested by our text. A mischievous *vegetable* root (say, of a worthless weed, or of an offensive or poisonous production) springs up into only *one* kind of evil. But here, in the *moral* soil, we have one thing named as the root of *all* evil. In the principles of *moral* evil there is a dreadful provision for supernumerary mischief.

It is not, however, meant that literally all the evils there are spring from the love of money,—but that it is the cause of many and various ones. Now surely, a vicious principle which produces so *many* bad effects should be exposed, and forcibly protested against. And that not *seldom*,—if we consider that a thing which has a variety and multitude of bad effects *is always working some of them*; it has not a single and temporary operation.

How comes it, then, to be so unusual, in the discourses of our Christian teachers, to fix upon this

vice with adequate terms of reprobation? Is it, that they are afraid lest they should give offence and provoke anger?—For, truly, covetousness, though its most obvious character be that of a cold and hard disposition, is yet a very irritable and resentful one. Or is it, because there is a difficulty in stating, discriminatively, *what* “love of money” (in kind or degree) *amounts* to the vice of covetousness; so that this disposition in a man might be brought plainly to the test?

We *will* not attribute this omission to a notion that it is no GOSPEL preaching to expose and censure an evil which our Lord and his apostles seized *every* occasion to condemn and warn against, in the most emphatic language.

It cannot be, neither, that the Christian ministers never descry any signs of the *existence* of such a thing, anywhere among their congregations, or even their *churches*. No; often enough, when disclosing their thoughts in converse with a few confidential friends, they are heard alluding, with imputations of this vice, to individual professors of religion, even within their own communion,—sometimes sorrowfully,—sometimes indignantly. The *indignant* feeling one has sometimes heard expressed in terms to *this* effect: namely, “When there occurs, in the conduct of some person in one of our churches, some single circumstance of very marked impropriety, perhaps from the surprise of temptation, exciting a sudden impulse of temper or passion,—we are under the necessity of taking account of it—and proceeding to an act of severe censure—perhaps to the length

of exclusion from our society. But, there is at the very same time among us, and concurring in this very proceeding, a man, of good property perhaps, who is evidently and unquestionably actuated by a constant, intense love of money. He is *known* by his neighbours and acquaintance to be both parsimonious and avaricious. (And of his parsimony at least, we, as a religious society, have too sensible proof.) But, he *professes* himself a disciple of Christ:—has given a very rational and *apparently* sincere account of how he was brought to become such. In his religious opinions he is true to the evangelic standard. He is punctual and serious in all our religious services, public and private; quite regular, decorous, and correct in the tenour of his conduct; no scandals, no frivolities, and no transgressions of the bare rules of legal justice in his dealings. But, then, there is this one habitual, pervading vice, of covetousness. Does not this constitute a much greater amount of what is contrary to Christianity than many an act of misconduct for which we would exclude a person from our communion? But we do not know how to take formal cognizance of it, or to shape the charge against him. And so, between this difficulty, and the judgment of charity, we are constrained to keep silence, and to treat him as an honourable member of our Christian society.”

Cases more or less answering to this description are far enough from being uncommon in the experience of churches and their ministers. But whatever difficulty they may involve, let not, at any

rate, the teachers of religion be deterred, in their public ministrations, from declaring against this vice, most explicitly, and not unfrequently. Let them not be afraid to read for their text, "*Covetousness, which is idolatry ;*" or this good text of ours, "*The love of money is the root of all evil.*"

The plainest mode of illustration would be, after describing the passion itself, to represent, specifically, several of the "*evils*" in which it shows its character and operation. The passion ("*the love of money*") exists under various modifications. In some few of its subjects, it appears to be pure, unmixed, exclusive ; terminates and is concentrated upon just the *money itself*,—(that is, the *property*) the delight of being the owner of so much. "It is mine ! so much !" It is the fervent desire of being able to say, "So much more I am worth !" The whole soul is absorbed in this one sentiment. This is plain, genuine *idolatry*.

But, in much the greater number of instances, the passion involves a regard to some *relative* objects. In some it is combined with vanity ; a stimulating desire of the *reputation* of being rich ; to be talked of, admired, envied. We have even heard of such a thing as a desire of the fame of *dying* rich !

"That loudest laugh of hell, the pride of dying rich !"

In some, it has very much a reference to that authority, weight, prevailing influence, in society, which property confers ; here, it is *ambition*, rather than *avarice*.

In some, the passion has its incitement in an exorbitant calculation for competence. So much, and so much, they shall want ; so much more they *may* want, for themselves or their descendants. So much more they should like to secure as a provision against contingencies. They have, perhaps, a settled preference of a mode of living ; they do not *think* they shall ever be disposed materially to change it ; but they wish the means for doing so may be in possession, in *case they ever should*.

Some are avaricious from a *direct dread of poverty*. Amidst their thousands, they are haunted by the idea of coming to want. Some miserable mortals surrounded with immense opulence have been dogged and harassed by this like an evil spirit. When it has been a toil but to keep the account of their revenues, they have pinched themselves and their dependants in the plainest necessities of life, from apprehension lest they should one day come to beggary or starvation!—This is the *insane* excess, of rare occurrence. But there are many men in whom an avaricious disposition is incited, and in their own view justified, by some undefined danger of being reduced to indigence. And this idea of danger, from *being* undefined, can *always* hover about a man, and force its way into his thoughts.

So described, this spirit, possessing and actuating such a number of our fellow mortals, bears an ill and a very foolish aspect. Let us now specify a few of its evil effects, with a note of admonition on each of them.

One obvious effect is,—that it tends to arrogate,

and narrow, and impel the whole action and passion of the soul toward one exclusive object, and that an ignoble one. Almost every thought that starts, is to go that way. If the man's mind were to fall into a mere vague *musings* of fancy,—he would very soon find it got *there* again ; an unnoticed but constant current has carried him *thither*. If he has occasion, and strong occasion, to think of a quite different subject a while,—the thought instinctively and dexterously takes a turn *that* way. When he rises in a morning,—when he looks at the materials of his business—when he takes a walk—when he falls into conversation—still *thither* goes his mind. Silver and gold have a magnetic power over his whole being. The *natural* magnet *selects* its subject of attraction, and will draw *only that* ; but *this* magnetism draws *all* that is in the little world of the man's being. Or it is an effect like that of a strong, steady wind ; every thing that is stirred and moveable, that rolls on the ground, or floats on water or air, is driven in that one direction. If it were a *noble* principle,—if it were *religion*, that exerted over him this monopolizing and all-impelling power, what a glorious condition ! but just as inglorious and degraded, when the commanding principle is—the love of self !—What a humiliated being,—for a spiritual, rational, and immortal one,—you behold, when you are observing a man whose whole inquisitiveness, and his emotions, of hope, fear, pleasure, and grief, are *mechanically* borne toward devices, opportunities, and successes or failures, in the prosecution of this one object.

The brief admonition upon this is, that if a man feel this to be mainly the state of his mind, it is a proof and warning to him that he is wrong.

Observe, again, that this passion, when thus predominant, throws a mean character into the estimate of all things, as they are all estimated according to a standard of *money-value*, and in *reference to gain*. Thus *another* value which they may have, and, perhaps, the *chief* one, is overlooked, unseen, and lost. They may be things highly adapted to intellectual interest,—to enlarge knowledge,—to gratify a cultivated taste. Or things of importance for the convenience or improvement of mankind ; or, connected with the operations and advancement of *religion*. (Thus the dissenters have lately been taxed with building places for the worship of God on a pure speculation for making money.) In the view of the covetous man all things stand divested of their peculiar character and colour, and he sees nothing in them but what is available to *his* purpose—of gain ; he has a cold contempt of all other pursuits.

Again,—this passion places a man in a very *selfish* relation to other men around him. He looks at them very much with the eyes of a *slave-merchant*. He cannot *sell* them, but the constant question is, “ *What, and how, can I gain by them ?—This one, and that, has been worth so much to me ; what can I make of the third ?—What I can gain by them, any of them or all, is all I care about them.*” Think of the *friendships* of such a man,—and his engagements in co-operation !

When this principle has the full ascendancy, it creates a settled *hardness* of character. The man lives, as to the kinder affections, in the region of perpetual ice. He is little accessible to the touches and emotions of sympathy ; cannot give himself out in any generous expansion of the affections. Even when he appears cheerful and social, those who know him feel a chilling atmosphere round him. Distress, which he sees or hears of, especially when from *want*, has little influence on him,—except to shut him up the more firmly in his well-guarded selfishness. Covetousness can supplant even what may be called the natural sentiments of humanity. Thus, many a one has calculated coolly,—or rather with the warmth of desire, on the death of friends or near relatives, in consideration of what would be *gained* in consequence ! And this suggests, that *hypocrisy* is a vice incident to this character. For often a *seeming* of kindness, fair pretences, professions of regard, &c.—are practised to the living, and a temporary appearance of sorrow assumed over the dead.

All this may be *short* of acts of *injustice*, in the *ordinary* sense of that word. Such a man may have a *conscience* not to violate the *palpable, technical* limits of right and wrong. Indeed, he may be a *self-righteous* man all the while, and rest his merit, his moral excellence, on this very ground ; that he has maintained a strict integrity ; that he has *wronged* no one—has met all just claims. At the same time, you will find him always going as *near as possible* to the extreme line of limitation.

And here observe, again,—that the disposition in

question operates, with a slow but continual effect, to pervert the judgment and conscience. It is constantly pressing the line that divides right from wrong; it removes it, bends it away, by slight degrees. The distinction becomes less positive to the judgment. Self-interested casuistry is put in operation. Unsound pleas, and reasons, and excuses, are called in. There is a constant tendency to *equivocate with conscience*; and this often ends in at once satisfying it and defrauding it. Let every man who feels the working of this passion, and is not willing it should beguile him, bring himself under a rigorous examination before God, on this ground.

We need not, before a Christian assembly, do more than just *advert* to the enormous account of *absolute and flagrant wrongs* which have been perpetrated from the love of money;—the frauds—the taking advantage of *law* in despite of moral justice,—the plunders and murders—and the black list of other iniquitous expedients. What a legion of violences and villainies this passion can boast to have brought upon mankind!

But, it comes nearer to the object of Christian admonition, to observe the operation of this evil principle in ways not incompatible with what may be called integrity.

It withholds from all the generous and beneficent exertions and co-operations, in which *pecuniary* liberality is indispensable; and excites against them a spirit of criticism, exception, cavil, and detraction. “They are sanguine, extravagant.” “This is not the time.” “They are unnecessary, impracticable.”

“There are many evil consequences.” “At least I will wait to see.” “There are many persons on whom the claim is greater than on me.”

It causes to forego opportunities for gaining a beneficial influence over men’s minds.

It puts an *equivocal and inconsistent* character on *Providence*. “As to *my own* interests, Providence is not *at all* to be *trusted*—I must take the whole care on myself. As to *other* interests, *they* are to be *wholly* left to Providence ; Providence will take care.”

We only add, it fatally counteracts and blasts internal piety, in all its vital sentiments. Now, the *admonition*, upon all these representations, is, that those who feel or suspect in themselves any tendency to love money too much, should most faithfully inspect their minds, to ascertain whether the passion is producing any of these evil effects ; whether it is IN A DEGREE doing this. For there is danger of self-deception in the very act of applying these representations as tests.

These descriptions for exemplification, are put in the strong and extreme form ; and a man may easily say, and perhaps truly, “the love of money carries me no such lengths as *that*.” But be it remembered, that a *degree* of evil is the evil *in that degree*, and always *tending to more*. Let a man who is sensible of the “*love of money*,” examine whether the feeling fixes very much on the *thing itself* (the property, the gain) without a conscientious respect to its proper *uses* ;—whether, the more he *has* gained, the *more he has felt disposed* to consult his conscience about its proper use ;—whether it is *growing* in its power over

his mind ;—whether unsuccessfulness in the pursuit of gain, (or the loss of it,) has been felt by him, or not, a grievance more distressing than a conscious want of prosperity in his *spiritual* interests ;—whether, if successful, he has been willing to take that as a kind of consolation, and compensation, for a conscious deficiency of *religious* welfare ;—whether his “*love of money*” be but such, strictly no more than such, as leaves a very clear distinction between the professed Christian and the mere man of the world ;—whether it be really such as does *not* interfere with the grand duty of mainly “*setting the affections on things above, and not on things on the earth ;*” —whether it comport with an habitual, solemn consideration of the account of the stewardship to be given to the Great Master ;—and finally, whether it consist with a constant reference to the prospect of leaving the world behind, and with an earnest preparation to leave it.

1825.

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LECTURE XXIX.

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

ZECHARIAH iv. 10.

“ Who hath despised the day of small things ? ”

THE question supposes the actual thing inquired for ; namely, that there are such persons. It is not one of the questions which imply the answer that none have done the thing described ; as for example, “ *Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him ?* ” Isaiah xl. 13. For contempt for small beginnings is one of the most ordinary displays of the human disposition, in all departments of affairs, but especially in things connected with sacred interests. We need not doubt that this was the case when Noah began building his ark. When the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilding after the captivity, the enemies said “ *even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall.* ” It is related that when the commencement was made of laying the foundation of what was to be ROME, one of the persons present expressed his contempt by leaping over the humble construction. Divers of the great powers, and influential systems,

good or evil, that have had a mighty effect, have, in their apparently insignificant origin been despised. Individuals appointed to be of the greatest importance in the world, have often experienced contempt in the beginning of their career. When David a stripling came from the sheepfold to the camp, how was he received by his martial brethren? And history does not want for instances of some man who eventually had a great influence on the condition of the world, experiencing contempt in his rise,—in his youth,—in his first aspirings, projectings, and attempts. And then there was our Lord himself, “*the bright and morning star*” of the moral world, contemned as a vain meteor when he rose. We cite him as an instance, though in one view, there was nothing “*small*” in the beginning of his glorious era, since it began with a manifestation of Divine wisdom, power, and goodness. But regarding his ministry as the commencement of a cause, of an actual acknowledged dominion, on the earth, and as compared with the extending and ultimate prevalence of that cause,—we might account it “*small*.” And think how he was received by the men of his time and nation! “*He was despised, and they esteemed him not!*”—“*despised and rejected of men!*” In spite of the lustre of his heavenly wisdom, the charm of his benignity, the very splendour of his miracles, they cast on him scorn and ignominy. They talked contemptuously of the meanness of his human descent,—of the contrast fancied between him and Moses—and of his associating with people of the lowest quality. No fear was felt of expressing scorn

of him, both in words and actions. The utmost contempt that was compatible with hatred was poured on him from every side. They would have disdained even a dream that he was beginning a kingdom which was to spread over the world—that he was putting in action a cause which should triumph at length over the Powers of Darkness and all the hostility of man.

Alas ! how much men have been mistaken as to the proper objects of their contempt ! and what a vain presumption in their calculations ! Before men indulged their contempt, they should always have had good evidence that there was no quality of heaven—no principle of divinity in what they despised. For they might be quite sure that, if there were, the despised object was destined to rise up to throw shame and contempt on them. But the fact has been, that the vain world has always been peculiarly disposed to an unhesitating contempt of the small beginnings of divine operations,—to attribute meanness to what had a relation to infinite greatness. The Christian cause itself, in its early stage (after its Lord had left the world,) was an object of extreme scorn ; every ignominious epithet was connected with the name of a Christian. It has often been remarked, in what terms of mingled contempt and abhorrence, certain of the great Roman writers have slightly alluded to Christianity. And, in subsequent periods, most of all the important reforms, relative to the interests of truth and religion, have made their first advances under derision and reproach, combined with animosity and hatred. So fared the

great "*reformation*" itself. The denominations of "*filthy dreamers*," ravers, scum of the earth, reptiles, profane beasts, madmen, plentifully accompanied the more savage denunciations, which consigned the reformers to prisons, inquisitions, and fires. They cursed, but often they cursed in a sneer. The contempt entertained for the slender beginnings of such grand movements, continued till they became great enough to be dreaded and hated ; contempt was often affected still ; there was a forced laugh through the dark, disturbed looks of detestation and apprehension.

Our present object is, to comment on the tendency in men to indulge contempt for good things, in the littleness and weakness of their beginnings and early operations.

The case with our world is, that Man, having lost his original goodness, was, thenceforth, to be under an economy of discipline, for his correction and practical restoration ; but that the operation for this was not to be sudden—rapid—overwhelming—universal,—not one comprehensive, 'stupendous miracle of transformation. No ! the divine scheme was (the fact shows it) that the work, so grand in the final result, should be, by various processes, commencing in different periods of time, and parts of the world—and commencing in an apparent littleness of agency, power, and scope, so as to appear, in human judgment, incompetent to a great purpose,—struggling with difficulties, — slowly progressive, — gradually combining, as springs and rivers find their way to combine in rivers, and rivers fall into confluence, in their magnificent progress to the ocean.

Why has the Sovereign Wisdom appointed it so? Why? Human wisdom is reduced to silence. The inquiring mind may look, with long intensity, on the mystery, but there is no gleam or glimmer through the darkness. And none can tell how far it is through that darkness to the region of light. A consequence or two, however, of the case being so, may be noted. It is a higher discipline for the servants of God, as agents in a good cause, as it brings their principle of obedience under a more plain, unequivocal proof. They render a more simple obedience, (more on the bare principle of obedience)—a plain, direct submission to authority and command; it is a stronger trial and proof of their sincerity, faith, and patience, so that they rather act from believing than seeing. It tends to keep them under a direct, pressing, conviction that all the power is of God. “My feeble hand! my baffled will! No success but as He pleases!” They will have a stronger sense of the value of the good that is so hardly and slowly accomplished,—will verify and prize its worth by small portions. As a man, in a slow, laborious progress to wealth or high distinction, appreciates each added particle and step of advance,—abides a little while with each, dwells complacently on it.

To return to the text. There is much of a disposition to undervalue, “*despise*,” the small beginnings, and slow, early stages of a good work. It were well, if we could expose the error and injustice of this disposition.

And for one thing, shall we say, it comes from not duly apprehending the preciousness of what is good,

in any, even the smallest portion of it. Any essential good, in the highest sense, is a thing of inexpressible value ; especially so in an evil world, where it is scattered among baser elements. It is a particle of heaven dropped on our soil, a "*pearl of great price*." Let us not say, it is but so much, or so much ; that is, so little. Look at its quality, its colour ! Who would throw a small piece of gold away ? It is a thing to delight ourselves with ; is it not even the more so, because it is scarce ? Here is what Satan has not been allowed to steal. Some thing may have only a relative, this has an absolute, value. If "*despised*," in the small portion, it will not be rightly estimated in the large. For it were, then, not the quality, but only the quantity ; whereas, the large is valuable, because each part is so.

Again ; in the indulgence of this disposition, it is left out of sight, how much, in many cases, was requisite to be previously done, to bring the small beginning into existence at all ; it did not start into existence of itself. Though "*small*," it may have been the result of a large combination. What providential conjunctions, — progress of society, — long and anxious thinking, in minds touched by the finger of God, — attempts, trials, made and frustrated, — sometimes sufferings endured, — and contempt, — "*despising*" enough endured, sometimes, before a worthy design could be made a practical thing — be in an organized form for action. Now this should be reckoned into the value of the thing. It is the precious, compounded, extract of all these materials.

Sometimes one thing, and sometimes, another, could be specified, in default of which even a hopeful attempt could not have been made.

Another thing is, that we are apt to set far too high a price on our own efforts and services. The thing accomplished appears as yet but "*small*," but, to think what it has cost us! Far enough from "*small*," truly, have been our labours, expenditures, sacrifices, self-denials, inconveniences, pleadings, — perhaps prayers. We have striven,—why such perverse and baffling opposition? We have reasoned,—why so few convinced, when the reasoning was the very sunshine of truth? When we *have* convinced,—why such indifference and inaction? We have contributed money,—why such parsimony in many who have more of it? We have preached,—how little the people are mended for it all! We have formed schools, or taught them,—does one in ten of the pupils become such as they ought all to be? We have circulated bibles by the million,—where are the large conspicuous evidences of the benefit? Where does the book turn the house to a temple? Our self-importance cannot endure that so much of our agency, *ours*, should be consumed for so small a result. A tenth part of the pains should have done as much. It is not an equivalent; and it is a hard doom to work on such terms.

In such ways, a good cause, in its first small successes, may be, in a sense, said to be "*despised*," even by those who do something to promote it. For they undervalue it,—are mortified at it; it does not repay them,—elate them,—do them honour. But

by many others, there is felt a real, unmodified contempt. They laugh, but with malice in the mirth, at the schemes, undertakings, and hopes, of zealous, good men. It is within the recollection of some of us, for example, what unlimited scorn was poured on the Serampore Mission, in all forms and changes of contemptuous language,—all terms of contumely,—all figures and parallels to fix upon it a character of abasement, folly, and lunacy ; with an admixture of the light, genuine notes of ridicule ;—in publications, and senates, and camps. It might have been supposed that fanatical frenzy must have assumed a wilder, more extravagant shape in India, than all its own whimsical and monstrous superstitions had ever exhibited in disgrace of human reason. “The madness,” it was said, “of men who could dream of converting Indian pagans, by means of bibles, preachers, schools, and paltry tracts ! Well, let them—(since the hand of power will not interfere to suppress the thing at once)—let them go on with their meeting, and declaiming, and praying, and contributing, till they are tired,—let them fret their madness away, and become sober by despair !” And less or more of such scorn has assailed every new project for religion, in its origin and first stages.

Again ; it was observed that we over-rate our own efforts in regarding the effects, the results, as so little in proportion to them ; it may be added, that we over-measure our brief span of mortal existence. We want all that is to be done for the world, to be done in our time ; that a vast process should make a visible, measurable movement, going along with our

rapid succession of months and years. We consider not, that the divine scheme is formed on the scope of immensity and eternity ; that all the parts of it must proceed in equalised relation to one another ; something in slow progress here, may be waiting the advance of something elsewhere, to be in consentaneous operation. But we want to contract the Almighty's plan to our own limits of time, and to precipitate the movement, that we may see clearly to the end of it. Something like as if a man commencing the process of cultivation on the edge of an American wilderness, should be vexed that the vast extent of forest cannot be cleared in a year or two ; or, a wish, that the lands and seas of the globe could be narrowed in order to a quicker traverse.

In all this, there is the impiety of not duly recognizing the supremacy of God. Being called on to act our little part in his grand scheme, we begin to say,—“ Let us understand it first, in its entire extent ; — its proportions, harmonies, — relation between means and ends.” And what for ? Why, plainly, that we may see whether we can make it *our* plan. We are not content to say, “ It is God's plan, and that's enough.” We want it to be such, that we can take it for ours, on its own reasonableness and wisdom, independently of the will of God ; irreverently saying, in effect,—“ We must know distinctly what we are about, while giving our service in this concern.” In all this, the grand essential of religion, *faith*, is wanting ;—faith in the unerring *wisdom* of the divine scheme and determinations ; a mighty conviction that infinite intelligence cannot be wrong

in judgment ;—faith in the *goodness* of God ; an absolute certainty that infinite wisdom and power cannot be otherwise than good ;—faith in the *promises* of God ; that his servants shall, in the *succession* of their generations, see his cause advance from the small to the great, though this be not granted to any *one*, separately ; that their little labours shall be, each in their turn, approved and recorded ; and that they shall at last exult in the glorious consummation. “*He shall bring the headstone thereof with shoutings,*” (Zech. iv. 7.)

With such faith, let us look on “*the day of small things,*” and remonstrate against the tendency to despise it ; whether it be in good men, from impatience, and a very censurable self-importance ; or in worldly men, from irreligion. And to this purpose it would not be a quite foreign reference to look, a moment, into the natural world, as having an analogy emblematical of a higher order of things. There we see many instances of present actual littleness containing a powerful principle of enlargement : the seed of a plant, the germ of a flower,—the acorn of the oak. Does the planter despise it,—the unclosed bud,—the slender shoot ? Shall we say, look at a small particle of fire—how insignificant ! But there is in it a mysterious principle of tremendous power. There is infancy, that of man,—and his childhood ; but does the parent “*despise*” this “*day of small things ?*” Let us turn to that higher department (the religious and moral), which is denominated in a more peculiar sense the kingdom of God on earth, the promotion of which is the cause of God. There

the things that as yet are "*small*" are to be estimated, not according to their present dimensions, but according to their principle, and according to what they are to become. We are to recognize in them a *divine* principle ; that God has put in them his will, his power, his spirit. If they be of his originating, his appointment and approval,—they have in them an inextinguishable principle of life and power, however inconsiderable they appear ; they have in them, then, the *value* of that principle.

But it may be asked,—what things, as yet apparently small, come under this description ? We answer ; all things, judiciously and in good faith, attempted to promote the best cause, that is, to diminish the awful sum of human depravity and misery. For example,—efforts to diminish the dreadful amount of *ignorance* ; that mankind should be raised out of the grossness of a mere sensual existence, to pass a mere animal life and die,—should have their souls brought to exist for their own selves, and not merely for the forms of matter which they dwell in ;—should have light let in through these bodily enclosures ;—that they should not remain wholly unapprised of a thousand things which concern them, be rendered capable of being treated, and treated with, as beings that know the meaning of things ; and not meet the more enlightened just as if it were mere dull matter meeting mind ;—so that they should not be as a cast-off mass of humanity, with which cultivated humanity feels as if it had nothing to do, and be content with that condition. Now the system of efforts and means for working this

important business, with any thing at all like the due extent and activity, is of comparatively recent origin ; so that, though that has been a considerable effect, it is still "*the day of small things* ;" and there has been no lack of "*despisers*," even up to the present time, as seen in contemporary publications.

This topic, of course, includes the progress of *Education*. The wide opprobrious neglect of it, through generation after generation, neglect by State and Church, by the wealthy of the nation, and magistrates, and parents,—had left it in so wretched a condition, that to many it seemed almost hopeless : while others, who did not care for its condition, ridiculed those who were not willing to let it remain so ; wished them success of their drawing water with a sieve. Much has been done, certainly ; more, we hope, will be, ere long. But, considering how very little it is that millions receive, and that hundreds of thousands receive none, we must confess that it is "*the day of small things*."

We must name, *the progress of genuine Christianity*, in even a nation nominally Christian ; its present degree of prevalence, in real belief, feeling, and practice. We should not, and would not, be uncharitable ; but suppose, such a thing might be, as that, the Infallible Discerner, who will, at the last day, make the manifestation, were to distinguish, by some visible sign, who are genuine Christians (that is, really in earnest about religion, sincerely devoted to God and Christ, intent on salvation,) would not such a manifestation of the respective proportions be an overwhelming spectacle to a pious and benevolent

mind? But who, unless instigated by Satan, would "*despise*" *this* measure of progress and prevalence? No; rather we should bless God for so many, and for every one; and while under an awful impression of the mystery of the restricted prevalence of Christianity, yet in a confident assurance of a glorious outpouring to come in God's due time.

If we look widely abroad, beyond our immediate sphere, over the vast portions of the human race, under the domination of all manner of imposture and delusion, it is indeed "*the day of small things*" for Christianity. But then, what is it, that, on this account, shall be despised? Is it Christianity itself, which God has sent on earth? Or is it, God who has sent it? Or, our Saviour, who brought it? or, the benevolent interest that good men take? or, missionaries who go, and indefatigably labour? or, the translations of the Bible into various languages? or, the converts made, however comparatively "*small*" in number? or, the alterative process, short, as yet, of decided conversion, but partially breaking up the inveterate fortified security of superstition? No; the good is essentially valuable, as we were saying before;—valuable for what it is; and also, for what it portends. For itself, considered alone; the testimony to this is in heaven, for "*angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth*;"—and on earth, for what devoted, apostolic man would not justly rejoice (and all good men with him) over one true convert from paganism? And at home, does any faithful minister "*despise*" even the first unequivocal manifestation of a happy change in one individual?

But, we say that, commencing operations and movements in the cause of God, have a warning against men's contempt of their smallness at first, in virtue of being destined to advance to something greater. We may be confident that when God makes, or causes, a beginning of a good work, it is intended for progress and expansion. It is most certainly, not a single, solitary thing, at once a beginning and an ending; a mere unmeaning phenomenon; a transitory meteor. It is in a connexion and train to something which is to follow. And what should *that* be, but more good, and still more, interminably? For if it be good in the "*small*," better still in the large; therefore, worthy of God. What else should God design it for, when it is plainly adapted to become an immense good? Would he just show what it might become, and then extinguish it? make the tree of life spring up, to cut it down? Not, surely, just to prove that he is able to maintain its existence, even in perpetual littleness, in defiance of an evil world that would destroy it? Not, for example, to show that he can preserve a little spot of Christianity, one small Christian church, in the edge or the interior of a vast pagan realm, in spite of attempts against it? It must be, for progress. And, in fact, we see that the good things sent to make their way on earth have been progressive and enlarging—civilization,—knowledge,—rational science,—useful arts,—Christianity itself, and the indispensable means for promoting it. So that while our "*day*" is that of "*small things*," in comparison to what we desire, and hope, and pray for, it has considerably a character of

magnitude, as compared with that of our remote, (and even not very remote,) forefathers. And we may soberly think, we perceive some signs of accelerated progress ;—some dawn of a more bright and powerful dispensation. We are not now, therefore, to lose our faith or earnestness in praying, “*thy kingdom come.*” At the same time (to revert to our word “*soberly*”) we should take care not to talk and boast extravagantly of what is done,—of what we do. There has been indiscretion in this matter. A soldier is not to blazon some minor successful actions and inroads on the enemy, as if they were half the war and the conquest. We may well rejoice at the “*little cloud like a man’s hand,*” and say, “There is a sound of rain, and even some drops,” without saying, “What a prodigious shower is falling !”

But now, to remonstrate and warn against “*despising.*” To a decidedly irreligious contemner, we might say, “Beware what you do ; for if the thing be of God, you are daring *Him* by your contempt. If there is something of his spirit and power contained and acting in these things, it is not safe to make free with them in the way of scorn, however inconsiderable in magnitude they may seem. If we might suppose such a thing as that, in the early stage of the transactions in Egypt, a bold pagan had seized the rod of Moses, and flung it on the ground in contempt,—would it not have turned to a serpent once more ? “*Who hath despised ?*” It may *one day* (not “*a day of small things*” THAT,) be a question, not of rebuke, but of judgment. On that day, will not be forgotten a contempt of the introductory

littleness (say, rather, undisclosed dignity) of what God had determined to advance to greatness and glory. “*Behold, ye despisers,—and wonder,—and perish !*”

There is, also, the admonition to those who are too apt to fall into something like what the text describes,—not from hostility to religion and general improvement, but from want of faith,—from indolence, cowardice, or mere worldly calculation,—reckoning on things without reckoning on God. To undervalue is in a certain sense to “*despise*.” They are cold and unbelieving, just the opposite extreme to fanatical and visionary. As the speculations, and projects, and movements, and hopes, for making the world better and happier, come under their view, they say at each turn, “That will not do,—there are no adequate means,—obstacles are insuperable ;—there will be much labour for a very small result ;—think how foolish it would look in the event of failure ;—we have enough to do to mind our own interests ;—the time is not come yet ; will it not be more *pious*, as well as more prudent, to wait for signs ?—a good and great object, certainly, if attainable, but these small means, and agencies, and successes, what do they amount to for the purpose ?” We may answer, “This is, at any rate, the way to *keep* them small, as far as *you* are concerned ; and they will be kept so (that is, in their amount of human agency,) unless there be better men than you. And would you wish that there should be no better men ? That thus a good work should remain small and stationary, or even cease, by the refusal of all to co-operate in it, that so they might turn their own

fault to their own excuse or justification? They kept the good thing small, and then alleged that very smallness! Think! if this spirit had always prevailed in the slender beginning of worthy enterprises,—when a band of patriots were conspiring to free their country, as once in Switzerland,—at the reformation (to name that once again);—or in the instance, where a few good men joined and prayed together, collected a few pounds, and Dr. Carey preached to them, to “*attempt great things, and expect great things.*”

In remonstrating against the temper in question, shall there not be an admonition to examine whether pride, or sluggishness, or covetousness have not something to do with it? In some cases, it partly proceeds from the less blameable cause of a gloomy, apprehensive, disconsolate constitution of mind,—looking on the dark side,—dismayed by difficulties,—prone to fear the most and hope the least, dwelling on remembered and recorded failures more than successes.

But there may be the interference of *pride*. A man shall have such a notion of himself, and of a good cause, even the cause of God in some humble form or department of it, as to deem it unbefitting his dignity to connect or concern himself with it. It is not of an order, or in a state, to reflect any honour on a man of his high sentiments, refined habits, or consideration in society. To take any part in it might lower his level,—bring him into contact with a humbler class of human beings and Christians. Is it favoured and promoted by persons of account in the

world? “*Have any of the Pharisees or the rulers believed?*” Every one has observed, when any specific scheme, religious or philanthropic, is bringing into shape and operation, what anxious eagerness there is to obtain for it the countenance and patronage of persons of rank and wealth. This is an appeal to pride. It is known that then it will not appear “*a small thing*,”—will not be liable to be “*despised*.”

With some men, a good work or design (acknowledged to be such,) is of “*small*” account, when it has not the quality for rousing the sluggish temperament,—no brilliant points—no glare—no explosive sound,—proceeding in a quiet, steady tenour of operation, instead of bold impulses, and striking adventure,—with nothing to excite gaze and wonder.

Covetousness is to be marked, emphatically, as one of the most decided practical “*despisings*.” Most truly does a man treat the good things as contemptibly small, when he deems them not worth his money, that is, money which he could afford. The extension of the preaching of the gospel is not worth his money,—nor the building of places of worship,—the better education,—expedients for reforming the wicked,—enterprises for converting the heathen,—in short, the whole cause of Christ. He sees such things labouring with deficient means, some of them, yet much in their minority of force and enlargement, appealing to him; but no; they are not worth his money, by his sole standard of value; for him the noblest cause might remain diminutive and powerless to the end of time.

It may here be suggested, to imagine the feelings

towards the close of life, of men who remember having despised a good work in the time of comparative feebleness, but have lived to see it struggle through its difficulties, and now advancing into strength and expansion. In minds incorrigibly bad, there is intense malignity, (though perhaps no longer openly proclaimed,) they regard the thing almost as if it were a personal offence and insult, like what has been reported of the apostate Julian.

But we would rather refer to such as were not positively enemies, whose "*despising*," in a mitigated sense of the word (that is, depreciation,—standing aloof from a good cause,) was from little faith, self-sparing, false prudence, worldly calculation. They have to remember their cold, unfriendly looks at the concern and its advocates,—their perverse ingenuity in finding or making objections,—their predictions of failure,—their assumption of sounder judgment in making them,—how their favour was withheld, when worldly or irreligious men derided,—how their assistance was refused, when there was a pressing need of means. They have lived to see that the good cause could do without them, and that there were more generous, liberal, magnanimous spirits to be found in the community. They have lived to see the discountenanced undertaking advancing in a hopeful progress. But no thanks to *them*, that a new force has been brought into the field for conflict with error and iniquity,—that some "*dark places of the earth*" are partially enlightened,—that there has been a little extension to the kingdom of Christ. A disconsolate feeling arises on such a review. "I might have been

‘*rejoicing with them that rejoice ;*’” there is mortification at the least, but a much better sentiment in a mind *now* rightly affected—regret.

Well, at all events, the good cause of God, of Christ, of human improvement, is certain, is destined to advance and triumph. This is amply assured to us in every form of declaration and imagery in our inspired volume. Revelation, after looking back, over a long, wide, dark scene, has a delightful aspect toward a still wider bright one. And who would not prefer the order of having the fairer part of the world, the long, eventful day to come, the latter ? And, on the ground of reason itself, we may be perfectly confident that, under the dominion of Infinite Power and Goodness, what is good has on it the impress, and decree, and certainty of an ever augmenting prevalence—partly in this world, interminably hereafter. What is approved by Him,—honours Him,—resembles Him,—must be made successful, triumphant, and predominant, in His empire. He will not for ever suffer the enemy’s camp on his grand field. The awful mystery why this triumphant ascendancy is so slowly achieved,—so long delayed in this world, will, it is reasonable to believe, be one of the subjects for illumination in a higher state of existence, where enlarging faculties will have endless duration for their exercise. It may *then* be seen, that the whole course of the world, from the beginning to the end, was “*a day of small things*,” as compared with the sequel,—only as a brief introduction to an immense and endless economy.

Meanwhile, let us devote ourselves to the cause

which is to enlarge its powers and victories through all the ages of time, to go magnificently into eternity. Let us be faithful to that kingdom which has already beheld the decay and fall of so many proud and mighty empires—the Assyrian—Persian—Roman,—we may almost add, the Ottoman ;—*it* survives them all, treads on their ashes and ruins, and will, in its onward progress to universal dominion, realize the prophetic emblem of “*the stone cut out without hands,*” demolishing all hostile powers, and becoming as “*a great mountain filling the whole earth.*”

LECTURE XXX.

AGAINST WEARINESS IN WELL-DOING.

GALATIANS vi. 9.

“Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

It had been a most happy thing if such had been the condition of our nature that all of us should rather and sooner have been weary in everything else than in well-doing ; for instance, in all the amusements and ordinary pleasures of life ; but especially in *ill-doing*. But we have a grievous view of the state of our race in the fact, that a great number of men seem not tired of doing evil. We need not specify the modes and departments. But, observe, what perseverance—endurance—sacrifices—overcoming of obstacles—recovery of spirit after disappointments—what defiance of danger ! One might say—“I wish you could be ‘*wearied in the greatness of your way!*’”

Now, turning from this mortifying view to the other side, can we venture to set forth, and boast, an equal rivalry ? Are those who approve and adopt the practice of “*well-doing*” equal in these enumerated

distinctions? We fear not, if taken collectively. For by "*well-doing*" we must mean something beyond the ordinary proprieties of conduct,—things of decided Christian exertion, requiring energy and patience. And the case is, at all events, there is great need of the exhortation, "*Be not weary.*" Even the most faithful and devoted workmen, in the worthiest services, are not quite exempt from the operation of causes tending to this failure; they feel them, while they resist them.

For one thing,—there is that very prevailing temper of our nature, the love of ease,—horror of hard labour. The faculties, even such as are called active powers, delight in a kind of half-slumber—with a complacent consciousness of their existence—a self-flattery of their power,—what they *can* do, if they please. They are excited sometimes to some agreeable exercise, as long as it is agreeable. But hard effort, and under a necessity of continuing it—both soul and body naturally recoil from that. Why all this work for me to do? Am I never to be suffered to enjoy myself, and subside into the pleasant condition of having no demand upon me? Is toil still but the introduction to more toil? Oh! it has the bitter taste of the original sentence and curse, "*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.*"

And it may be noted,—that the reluctance and aversion are the greater when the labour is enjoined by extraneous authority—the imperative will of a foreign power. This insults the rebellious pride of the heart; "I am, then, to be a slave, as well as a labourer." And here we have partly an explanation

of that wonderful patience of activity in evil-doing. It is voluntary—self-willed—acting on the impulse of the evil passions ;—and those passions are a cherished part of a man's self.

But we should be speaking of *good* men's liability to be "*weary*." "Good men," we say ; but then, unhappily, they have not a completely reformed nature. ("*Why callest thou me good ?*") How far are they from having attained that happy state in which they might "*love (and therefore actively serve) the Lord with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves.*" They have to work for God, therefore, in the strength of but a *part* of their nature. The unreclaimed portion not only does not co-operate, but counteracts ; like a house in which there is a great business constantly to be done, requiring the activity of every one in it, but the members are at variance. What need is there to pray, "*UNITE my heart to fear thy name,*" that the whole forces may be available.

In consequence of all this, is the necessity of self-denial. We might call it a mode of "*well-doing*" in itself, but we rather consider it as a requisite in order to "*well-doing.*" And, can we do without it ? in which important branch of duty ? But it is a grievous necessity—a heavy pressure on the springs of activity and power. As if the soul must expend and exhaust its strength in fighting itself ; as if conscience pointing to a duty were a signal for a battle within ; or as if (to take a plainer illustration) a man appointed and required to employ himself in some field or department of labour, had a long, hard conflict to get into it. But no terms or images can

be stronger than those of scripture, "*cross*" — "*wrestle*" — "*mortify*" — "*crucify*," &c.

Again ; in the service of God (the comprehensive system of well-doing) there is a great deal that does not seem (*primâ facie*) for *ourselves*. Then the selfish principle comes into operation—"Why am *I* implicated—put under obligation—with so much that is *without* the sphere of my own interests? Have I not enough to do?—even the cause of God—he is all-powerful, &c. &c. And then there are these beings, who are, it is true, in a certain remote sense, *my brethren*—but why consider myself as if *made* for *them*? toiling to put right the numberless things wrong among them? conflicting with their ignorance and perversity? enduring, supplying their deficiencies, and necessities? doing for them, often, what they ought to do for themselves; and, apparently, little good resulting after all?"

There is a principle or sentiment of *false humility* that tends to "*weariness in well-doing*." "What signifies the little that I can do? It will make no difference. My whole account of labours and sacrifices will be but a cipher in the result; like a man who has made a long and toilsome journey, and looks to see how it will appear on a map of the world." Yet, this false humility itself may take its turn with *pride*; and the labours and services that were so insignificant—worthless for any effect—are now risen to a high estimate; a magnifying glass has been had in; the figures and items of the account stand out large. "I have done my share;—if the effect be small, it is no fault of mine. If others did like me—"

And here we may notice, as tending to the effect in question, the complaint of *deficient co-operation*. Not that this is not true, in the wide sense ; for if there were all the “*working together*” in every good cause, that there ought to be, the world would be transformed by the fact itself. In each one line of important labour there is this deficiency ; though less so than formerly. Hence we readily make a pause in our part of a good work, (lay down our implements) to think how vastly better it would go on, *if* there were far more to work in it,—and if those who do something would do much more, (‘as they ought.’) We fix on *particular individuals*, regretfully—reproachfully—indignantly. We do not say, “*Lord, WHAT shall this man do ?*” for we say what he ought to do, and, “*bid him that he assist us.*” We make an actual calculation of what they *could* do ;—then look at the good cause as *denied* all this powerful aid and agency, with some measure of that feeling with which our perverse nature looks at poverty. And there is in the case something of *vanity*, that is mortified at not having the *honour* of numbers, power, &c. on our side.

It may be specified as another thing tending to “*weariness in well-doing*” that, in the cause of God (peculiarly such) the object and the effect of “*well-doing*” are much less palpable than in some other provinces of action. It is not so evident and ascertainable *what* is effected. In the application of contrivance, labour, money, to things of a mechanical nature, or agricultural, or commercial, (or the *healing art*)—the degree of success generally makes itself

sufficiently visible. Not so, at least much less so, in the religious and moral department. *Some* indications are *there* also. But much of nearly latent good. Good principles gradually formed, fixed in silence. Truth imparted so as never to be expelled ;—innumerable serious thoughts and good resolutions ;—conscience impressed ;—temptations frustrated ;—consolation soothing distress ;—an alterative effect on the habits of action ;—good kept from going back. Now the labourer for this kind of good can and does believe that there is such a valuable effect,—but it comes faintly to his mind,—it is not stimulant. He wants a loud echo to everything he says ;—is not content that the sacred fire *is* alive, *does* burn, but does not blaze and explode,—does not throw off coruscations.

May we not add, in connexion with this, that the professed servants of the Great Master are prone to entertain toward *Him* a mercenary and distrustful feeling. They want a full and speedy return for their work ; prompt payment, as it were ; as if extremely reluctant to become creditors to the Almighty for any long term. The payments, if not doubtful, seem very slow and late. We have a narrow calculation, and yet an arrogant estimate of what, as we think, the effect of our labours ought to be. It should come within a short time, and yet it should be large. In theory, we readily admit that we are no judges of the right proportion,—or of when,—and cannot see forward to the ultimate ; and yet are tempted to prescribe to the Sovereign Ruler ; and require that there be adequate results (what

we should think so) within our short view ; else he does not deal fairly with his servants while working for Him. This at the same time that we acknowledge that results must come in the order of his own immense scheme.

Such are the discouraging circumstances, and perverse dispositions. Now there ought to be some considerations to be set against all this. And the first of them would be, that duty, expressly prescribed, is an absolute thing, independently of what men could foresee of its results ; though it be, no doubt, enjoined for the sake of results which God foresees and intends ; and they such, that if good *men* could perfectly foresee and understand them, they would perfectly approve the injunction. Such *knowledge* cannot be ; but perfect piety would approve by *faith*, and practically and willingly obey. That would be the elevated state in which a creature of God might say, “ My duty is itself my delight for his sake ; as to the results, whether I can understand them or not, I know they will be right. ‘ *My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish his work.*’ ”

But here, then, comes one consequence (or accompaniment) of “ *well-doing*,” as an argument against being “ *weary* ;” namely, the consciousness and the pleasure of pleasing God. “ *Enoch had this testimony, that he pleased God.*” Self-righteousness away, and imperfection and sin acknowledged, still the fact is so,—“ The Supreme of the Universe fixes a complacent attention on what I am striving to do to please him.” This being vividly realised, what

cause of weariness might it not be set against? Look up to heaven, and see the beams of the Divine complacency! "I obtain little of human favour to animate me in my work ;—well, but God is pleased. I accomplish so little by all my efforts—He does not *'despise small things.'*" Do you say, "I have not resolution and patience to go on." What! not to please God? At what point can the faithful servant be willing to cease pleasing such a master? At what new required effort may he stop, and say, It is not worth attempting this—to please God? Thus far I have tried to please him, but now it becomes too much ; I would rather, now, surrender that delight.

Consider, our Master has other servants, and it should not be absolutely foreign to our contemplation (as an argument not to be weary), that the noblest and best of all his creatures are never tired, or even remiss. Imagine the stupendous activity—the bright multitudinous agency—every moment—in so many scenes and employments—and from before the beginning of time! And would we have the Sovereign Master to look down through all this immensity and grandeur of action, to see us throwing his business aside in disgust?

But there is the Greater than all of them,—to whom Christians are commanded to look, "*lest they be wearied and faint in their minds.*" Think of his appointed work, the greatest that ever was to be done on the earth, so great, as to be a counteraction to all the sins of all the saved! and at an awful cost of endurance. What toils, what grievances, what terrors (as to his humanity) attended HIS mighty

task! But if he had been "*wearied*," and left but one thing undone! If he had shrunk and failed, what sensation in heaven—hell—earth! Let his followers advert to that, when tempted to shrink from service, and to say, it is too much. When this repugnance arises, go, and look at Him! Even imagine as if any given Christian service had been to be performed *in his presence*—under his inspection;—would you then be weary? He is the grand transcendent example, to show that a good work must be *gone through with*; to constitute it such, the conclusion is indispensable. "*He that endureth to the end shall be saved.*" "*He that looketh back, is not fit for the kingdom of God.*"

Against being "*weary*," let it be considered what is the fittest introduction and discipline for the other world. On what terms would a thoughtful spirit desire to go into it? Surely so as that there should be the greatest delight and fitness. Well, then, if it be considered as a *rest*, labour, up to the time; or, an *active* scene—bring highly exerted powers. Is it a scene for the triumph of victory? but then the good fight must be maintained up to the very gate. View it as an access to the noblest society, but then the new-comer must have belonged to the best society where he went from. In all reason, we must wish to bring, as near as possible, together, in likeness as well as time, the habits and spirit of the state we aspire to, and those in the state we quit; that it may not be a *vast abrupt*!

But to descend to lower considerations. We might ask a man who has engaged himself in the

service of God—the “*well-doing*,” what relief he would gain by yielding to the weariness? When a tired labourer can repose, upon laying aside his work, that is something. But can our Christian labourer? Will his conscience of duty be “*wearied*” out, and be quiet? (Jonah—“*What doest thou here, Elijah?*”) Looking at his means, powers, and opportunities, will he not be ashamed to have them? They reproach him with the use he might make of them. How would a soldier who had deserted from cowardice in battle, look at his arms? When he sees (within his province) good things not done, or spoiled in the manner of doing? When he meets the complaints, or even the regrets, of those whom he declines any more to aid? When he beholds the activity of evil? Or, when he sees good works going forward, and no thanks to him? His must be a restless state, if he have conscience and generous feeling. And, then, as to the “*reaping*”—*his* reaping—that goes out of sight. He *has* (our text implies) made worthy exertions heretofore. Then let him call up to view, the motives—the reasons. Are they turned to air? are they not valid *now*? which of them is not? Love and gratitude to Christ—do they “*constrain*” no longer? The worthy ambition of rendering some small part of the world a little better than it is—is that no longer worth the trouble of attempting? The desire of being associated in purpose and action with the most excellent of our race? Or, a confidence in the assurance that we “*shall reap*”—is that gone? But the labourers in the good cause must firmly stay by this assurance;

standing, as it does, combined with a vast number of promises to the same effect ; a magnificent assemblage !

We observed, that a creature, perfectly good, would serve God indefatigably on the pure principle of obedience. Yes, on this narrow and sublimely elevated ground. But God has not placed his servants on this ground. No ; he has set before them, bright and conspicuous, what he has condescended to call *reward*. It was so even with *Him* who was divinely perfect, the Mediator, who, "*for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross and despised the shame.*" And, no doubt, it is so with every faithful servant in the universe.

"*Shall reap,*"—We may take this as an assurance, *generally*, of success in the Christian labour itself ; success to some valuable extent ; so much as shall amply repay the labour, though less, perhaps, than desired, and sanguinely expected. But besides this—even independently of it—the persevering faithful will "*reap*" the divine approbation and acceptance—the Great Master's final applause ! The emphasis of the "*Well done !*" will not be proportioned to the measure of success, but to the devotedness, diligence, fidelity, perseverance. As to the "*due season,*" that must be left to the wisdom of Him who has "*the times and seasons in his own power.*" Whenever it comes, it will bring perfect evidence of its being the right time ; sooner had been premature. The main substance of the reaping will be in eternity ; that will be *the field !*

These general observations might be brought into

specific application to various departments of "*well-doing*," besides the Christian life in its general tenour.

To the concern of *education*,—whether in single families, or as to be promoted generally among the people. To endeavours and plans for alleviating the distresses of the poor, and imparting religious instruction to them. To all exertions for improving public institutions ; for abating in any and every way the corruption and misery of mankind ; (heretofore the slave trade, and slavery) the false religions—idolatry—imposture—superstition.

To efforts *to promote religion* among the people—that must be an object for the most cogent application of the text ; the best of all the "*well-doings*" on this gloomy planet. Angels themselves can be doing nothing better, wherever they are at work ; though they work in a grander style than mortals. And we know of no better methods or expedients than such as are already in use,—no undeveloped mode of power. Sometimes an impatient emotion may arise into a wish that there were some mightier, and magnificent, machinery ; that there were something analogous to those prodigious augmentations of power which science has supplied to material forces ; and that there were some giant agents to work the mighty engines. "The instrumentality for promoting religion should be of a strength obviously proportioned to the supreme excellence of the cause." (Fine vision of effects ; but it passes and vanishes.) There is an authoritative dictate from the Master ; "No, it is *you* that must work, and with such means only as I give you."

It remains, then, that we can only teach, and reason, and plead, and exhort. Some must employ their labour in preaching ; some, perhaps, in writing ; some rendering their tribute in the means of giving to religion a clear property in buildings, &c. Now, we must make a moderate, even a humble, account of these means and operations. But let us not be depreciating their value and efficacy, for the purpose of excusing a remissness, an unwillingness, to do the utmost we *can* to make them effectual. Let us not be saying, "If we had a mightier order of means, we should be glad to exert our whole strength in their application—if we could work miracles." And the while, just nothing is doing, where something would, if we employed the means actually in our power. Like as if men who had to make a laborious journey on foot, should sit down somewhere in it, and say, "Now, *if* we had but strong horses, commodious carriages—"

Our grave accountableness is, for making a diligent, patient, persevering use of the means God has actually given us. And so, the exhortation would address itself to *preachers*, and to those who are looked to for the means of dedicating, in perpetuity, the requisite edifices for the services of religion. To *preachers* ; they are under a great liability to become "*weary*," as to their *thinking* labour ; "*much study is a weariness to the flesh*." It is hard exercise to illustrate a subject in a *really thinking* manner ; how to furnish a diversity ; in presenting, again and again, the same topics, how to avoid a dull, flat sameness. They are often dissatisfied with their own per-

formances, even when their best. They sometimes perceive signs that they very imperfectly satisfy their hearers. There is the depressing effect of seeing a comparatively small success. There is a heartless estimate of the proportion between the means and the desired, and due, effect. How much of instructive, important truth, for how much, or rather how little, practical result !

But, "*let us not be weary in well-doing.*" Consider—It is no peculiar doom on them, to labour on such apparently unequal conditions.—Every good cause, in every age, in the hands of the greatest and the best of agents, has been subject to this. But, at the same time, there is some success ; sometimes there are conspicuous and most gratifying instances. Many good effects are perceptible though not strikingly prominent. And as to the general effect on a congregation ; let it be considered what may rationally be supposed the difference, in the state of their minds, between their receiving, and not receiving into them, such a measure of important thoughts. (Suppose the perfect absence of this, or all withdrawn, everything else being equal.) And whatever be the measure, let the preacher consider the value of spiritual and moral good, by its *quality* ; in the proportion of gold to the inferior, though valuable, metals. He may be prompted to say, "If it *be*, then, so precious, why does not God grant more of it ?" Answer, No man on earth knows. But if the preacher were meaning to ask, in a tone of complaint, why *his* labours are not rewarded with ampler success (as *deserving* it), he would justly be

smitten with a severe and humbling rebuke. It would be rating his exertions at a prodigiously exaggerated price indeed, if he should require that his course should be nothing but a triumphal procession. Let him say, if he can or dare, what measure of inestimable good would not be worth the sum of his labours. Supposing him faithful through life—and, near the end of it, to have but a very moderate account to make up of what he believes his success to have been, can we conceive him to say, “It is not worth the labour I have expended,—I might as well have given way to weariness, and let the work alone?”

But while we take the matter thus on a humble ground, we surely may hope and trust that, with the progress of time, a higher proportion of success will attend all Christian operations. Looking forward with perfect confidence to a bright and happy age, we are willing to hope it may not be *very* far off. And it would be according to the usual procedure of the divine dispensations that something of what is to come should be thrown forward into the introductory period. We may hope for a change gradually advancing faster. Indeed, if Christianity do not advance more rapidly than heretofore, *the world will grow worse*; because other things of great power and consequence *are* in a state of acceleration, and they need, absolutely, that Christianity should advance parallel with them, to keep them from dreadful mischief. The elements of the moral world will be out of proportion, and immeasurable disorder the consequence. And even if there were not this

necessity for the purpose of controul, we cannot believe that God would let the progress of his religion be quite the hindmost,—other forms of power marching boldly on, and this left yonder, at its former slow pace, almost out of sight.

We do trust, then, that in times not very far off, the faithful promoters of religion (preachers and others) will have a stronger stimulus against "*weariness*," in the more single success of the good cause. But then, so much the stronger faith, and more generous resolution, will be evinced, by their resisting and overcoming the tendency to weariness *now*.

There will need, we trust, but a few closing sentences in the way of turning the exhortation to the special purpose of the present occasion—i. e. the request for aid toward making this house a clear property to the cause of God, so that it might be said, every piece of stone and timber belongs to Him. And it is in the simple character of *petition*, addressed to good will, and Christian generosity, that such an object is pleaded; since, as Dissenters, we have nothing to rely upon, or appeal to, but the "voluntary principle," (a few small endowments;) that is, can claim nothing but what individuals may refuse. What thousands, therefore, what millions, of tokens of *free-will* are enclosed within our walls. (This, perhaps, a better *cement* than any intervention of *power* would have been.) That so much has voluntarily been done, and is doing, should be accepted as evidence of a concern for the cause of God, rather than any factious hostility to the National Church.

Those who impute such a motive would marvel if they were aware how little is said in our meeting-houses, how very rarely the subject of dissent is in any way adverted to ; indeed, *too* little.

But will not the liberal voluntary principle fail us at last, under the continual claims (exactions almost) that are made on it ? It will, if the exhortation in the text fail. There does often arise in the minds of contributors, the idea somewhat in the form of an objection and resistance, "There is no end to these applications." But if there were an end to them, what would that show, but that a great, expansive, and beneficent, agency, was stopped by some fatal limit ? that some power (*what* power ?) had said to it, "*Thus far, but no further ?*" And that would imply that an immense number yet remaining of the people of our land should receive little or nothing of the benefits of the gospel of Christ. The very numerous applications show that this melancholy doom has *not* fallen upon them. And as they gradually receive the gospel, how many of them will bless God that his servants, here and there, were not "*weary in well-doing !*"

In some instances an objection is raised, (not quite without reason,) that the undertaking is on too ambitious a scale ; an edifice too spacious, decorated, costly. We need not say, the house we are now in falls under no such censure. In regarding the claims of a house for the service of religion, let it be considered how long the utility may endure ; one long lapse of years after another, co-extended with the life of several generations. What a countless

series of sentences of instructions ! petitions in prayer, so many that He alone to whom they are made can keep the vast account ! Blessings from Him in consequence ; yes, in this very house. So that the contributed property—money—deposited in the walls (“sunk,” in commercial phrase) will be yielding *spiritual* interest indefinitely onward. And this is one of the ways in which some of those will “*reap*,” who are not “*weary*” of giving aid to the object. The habitual attendants, it may be hoped, will do so in their own persons, in the first instance ; afterwards, in those they leave behind. The occasional friends will acknowledge that, through the medium of benevolence and love to religion, *they* may enjoy a portion of the good, a certain interest in the good, which others obtain. Happy to “*reap*” in any of these ways ! But independently of all this—there is the consideration of the Sovereign Master, the sublime perfection of all beneficence, who takes account of his servants for another world ; who loses sight of no instance, throughout all time, of faithful perseverance in the good cause ; loses none from his remembrance ; and, in fulfilling his promises, will surpass all their expectations and conceptions. *Then* will they find that “*their labour has not been in vain in the Lord.*”

LECTURE XXXI.

THE SUPERIOR OBLIGATIONS OF CHRISTIANS.

MATTHEW v. 47.

“What do ye more than others?”

THE unhappy difference existing in the world, of good and bad, better and worse, affords, however, one advantage ;—the distinction may be turned to the use of exemplification, reproof, and exhortation. All arguments from comparison and contrast would be, of course, precluded by a universal sameness or similarity ; there would be no trial and manifestation by opposites. As the case is, one class, may, as in the text, be convicted, or ~~shamed~~, or stimulated by a reference to another ; so that good may be gained from what has no good.

But in attempting to make some practical use of the question, what classes are we to consider as placed in comparison ? Our Lord is addressing such as may be supposed to be aspiring to high excellence ; or at least were under a special requirement to do so. (*“Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is*

perfect.") Doubtless the requirement extends to all, in a general view of the obligation. The law is all-comprehensive ;—there are no degrees in the principle of duty, for that would be different laws. One divine law is equally peremptory to all. But yet there may be a portion or class of society more specially standing forth as under high obligation, by their profession, or position, or both ;—or by a more immediate form of summons ; they may be liable to a more direct appeal,—a more pointed censure if they fail. They, therefore, may fairly be challenged with the question in the text. And, who should they be, but those who expressly avow themselves the servants of God, for the cause of religion, and for doing good to men ? Now, while they, like all men, are amenable to the one sovereign law, they bring themselves under an additional accountableness on the ground of comparison, by their own voluntary profession of not being like certain others. But comparison with whom ? Not, certainly, with the worst of mankind ; they are not allowed to plead that they do more than those who do very little that they ought to do,—that they avoid gross delinquency,—preserve a decorum of conduct—and render to men what is due according to the ordinary rules of society. *That* is the ground of self-complacent comparison taken by a class much above the lowest,—by those who bear an unexceptionable character,—respectable,—trust-worthy,—attentive to the duties of their station,—such as no one would think of reproaching,—even paying some decorous attention to the observances of religion,—all this we mean in a decent degree—persons who are up

to the world's moral standard and apt to make self-complacent comparisons with others. Now it is with this portion of society, even the more respectable part of it, that the professedly devoted servants of God may be challenged into comparison, in the terms of the text, "*What do ye more than others?*"

And it may be said to them, you must not complain that more is expected. It is of your own choice that you take a higher ground by your profession ; by it, you avow principles and purposes greatly above the generality. You say, you dare not abide with them ; that Christ, whose disciples and subjects you profess to be, would have no actual kingdom on earth, that his religion would be of very secondary use, unless there were those who regulated their conduct by a higher standard ; you see and say that *they* are seriously, fatally deficient ; you would not consent to take your final lot with them.

But, somewhat more particularly. As the professed servants of God are supposed to be observing the characters of men, and forming a judgment of them, for the purpose, partly, of judging of themselves, we may specify some things they will see, (characteristics,) which may serve for points of admonitory comparison.

They will observe, for instance, a faint and very limited sense of responsibility. Those they are looking on have not a clear, abiding apprehension of the grand business and object of life, and of existence itself, enforcing on them what they have to do ; they are not impressively reminded and kept in mind that there is a Sovereign Master ; are not under a

habitual, compelling sense of duty, consciously warned, continually, that they must give an account ; they go on by habit ; this is the case with many who are by no means of ill reputè for immorality and positive irreligion. Now, then, the text, "*What do ye more than others ?*" Is the tenor of your life (internal and external) set, and aimed, and prosecuted to answer an assigned purpose, and the highest ? and all under authoritative orders ; here, and here again, is a law for me, and a Lawgiver, and a Judge. It is in a serious acknowledgment of my accountability that I do this or that. If my spirit would run loose, it is imperatively summoned back.

Again ; in looking on mankind, (even those not profligate or expressly irreligious,) the servants of God will observe the lamentably small effect of admitted truth—acknowledged conviction. There is a ready assent to many truths, involving rules of duty and the very highest interests. Well, that is admitted, what is to follow ? Those truths are for something beyond their bare selves ; unless something follow, they are roots not sprouting. *Nothing* follows ! The truths have no grapple. Now then, *you ?* An important truth is admitted by your judgment ; does it seize hold, and keep hold, of the other faculties ? Does it assume the character of a speaking oracle, and seem to say to the soul, and within the soul,—“ Here I am, and I will not be dislodged, and I will not be trifled with ; I will not be treated as if I had no business here ; I will not be put off with *words*. Your saying, ‘*I assent, it is so ;*’ an evil spirit would say as much. Nor will I sleep here ; I

am not *made* for sleep ; nor will I let you sleep, in careless contempt of my presence."

But, figures put aside, it is to be expected from the servants of God, that far more should follow from admissions and convictions, than does follow in "*others*." They see it in others to be a fearful, a tragical putting asunder of what God has united.

The required comparison will bring in view a numerous portion of society, (very far from the worst,) who yet are destitute of generous, enlarged, beneficent sympathies ; their souls are of a quality not expansive and pervasive ; they have no central fire to propel any generous emanations ; they have formed around them (or, rather, let it be formed, like northern ice) their little concentrated sphere of interest which confines and absorbs ; so that their concern, their feelings, never reach or approach many interests which ought not to be wholly foreign. We are not to be extravagant on this matter, nor talk in the language of that wild fantasy of "*Universal Benevolence*," as was once uttered by Godwin and others ; no spirit dwelling in flesh could ever expand its feelings to a world,—none but ONE. But, there is no need to disclaim any extravagant imagination to warrant our employing condemnatory terms in describing the character in question.

There is the just charge on those, with whom our Lord's disciples are to compare themselves, of a deficient sensibility to the evils which affect mankind, so numerous, various, continual, and of such dreadful amount. If thoughtfully contemplated, these evils are enough to suppress exuberant gaiety,—to bring a

cloud,—to inspire a pensive feeling,—to excite a frequent, pathetic appeal to heaven. They darken the moral atmosphere of the world. True, their constant, inveterate prevalence, and the inadequacy of all human power to remedy, inevitably have an effect to deaden sensibility. Still, it consists not with the Christian spirit, to be easy at such a view,—to regard it just a thing of course, as if the world was to abound in misery, and 'tis of no use thinking about it. “If we could, by a wish, make it otherwise, we would ; but why should it interrupt our pleasures ? We are glad if we escape ; as to the vast, unhappy multitude, Providence may look to them. There is as much wickedness as suffering, and the one deserves the other.” But “*what do ye more than others ?*” Do *you* deplore, compassionate, pray ?

So much for the generous, expansive, Christian feeling ; but, then, as to the practical application. We look around on men, and observe what good things they do not that they might. We fix on individuals, and, in thought, interrogate and arraign them. “Do you not see a most valuable thing you could do ? Why, it is just before you, and you are just the proper man. Do think what your activity, your interference, might or would do. Think what your money would evidently do. Mischief might be prevented,—a wrong might be redressed,—a most opportune assistance might be given,—some person in distress, or alarm, or difficulty, might be made to rejoice, and be grateful, perhaps, to God. How *can* you hold back ? Can you look at the case—the good thing you might do, and let it go by for ever ?”

So we say in one instance, and another ; but, then, "*What do ye more than others ?*"

In prolonging this kind of observation on others, we express our wonder that they can so easily content themselves in *not* having done—*not* this good—not that good, yet feel self-complacency ; their no-good does not haunt them as a grievance. Or it may not be quite a negation—not *no* good ; often some small matter, and then they feel the utmost self-satisfaction, for producing which, perhaps, one instance may suffice. There is no consideration of what the state of things would be if none did more, and no disturbance at the admonition, "*He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly.*"

Or sometimes they are content to *talk* for good things, and no more. Here it is to be noted, that in some cases, in many, to talk well is the service required. But often, this is not enough, nor the chief thing required ; and then, the talking to the purpose becomes a self-reproach. Now, "*what do ye more than others ?*"

Of such a disposition of mind some of the circumstances attendant or consequent are sufficiently obvious. One is, that such persons will not do good at any considerable cost to self-indulgence. "I will be just as I could desire for myself, apart from all such considerations." We may name luxury (without the invidiousness of pointed particularity) ;—unrestricted expenditure in the mode of living ;—what is mainly for show or display ;—to glitter in elegance or pomp ;—even the indulgence of fine taste, in a respectable sense of the phrase.

Such persons will not forego their ease,—they shrink from great personal exertion. Where is the reason or right to tax *me* for this labour, or this? they have a reverential awe of the weather, the clouds;—there is something quite formidable to them in a certain quantity of rain-drops;—they feel a recoiling at the offensive circumstances attending poverty and misery.

Again; there will be much calculation for *self* in what good is done by such persons. There may, indeed, be a little (or *not* a little) self-righteousness in the case; but a regard to self is shown in other forms,—“How will my interest be served? will it gain for me a good opinion which I can turn to account? Or, what measure of applause shall I obtain?” And there will be disposition to choose the modes and occasions most likely to gain it—“*to be seen of men.*” Sparing and reluctant will be the exertions or sacrifices when no temporal remuneration of any kind can be looked for; when it is only that conscience, only that God will approve.

Such persons, again, will never be the first, or among the foremost, in good services to God or man: they would feel great quiet in not hearing that anybody is doing anything out of the ordinary course,—would be pleased if it was found to be less than was reported. And when something is proposed or attempted, they are very slow to see any reason or necessity for it; or any prudence, any probability; and it is not till after one and another (neighbours, or persons whom they have often to meet, or whose high character carries a kind of enforcing authority)

have countenanced it, that they partially accede, and then to avoid disrepute; and still with caution not to do a good thing in such a manner as to involve a pledge for more, for a continuance; there is a careful retention of the privilege, "*to do as I like.*"

We may add one thing,—that persons of not decidedly Christian spirit will be much indisposed to any order of action which would go to take them out of friendship with the world. They will not do *that* "*more than others*"—*that*, which would subject them to the imputation of what the world means by the phrase of "*righteous overmuch*"—what would mark them as "*saints*"—"enthusiasts"—"fanatics"—what would be in contrariety to current notions—to easy morality—to frivolous amusements, and would unfit them to be quite at home with men of the world. In these times, indeed, there is a broader middle region. Still there are things, not compatible with the friendship of the world, but obligatory on the avowed servants of Christ. And the text asks them "*what,*"—how much,—of *these* things they do "*more than others.*" For example—devotional habits,—high conscientiousness,—earnest care of their own salvation,—labours for that of others,—protest against sin,—genuine zeal to advance the kingdom of Christ. Men must not take on them this character, and expect to sustain it at a low rate. They are to consider well what is the extent of the pledge. And the test of the Christian character will be, what obligations are recognized, and endeavoured to be practically fulfilled.

Now this being the state of the case, there would be many considerations to the effect of enforcement, admonition, and discrimination. We may suggest a few.

One is, to beware of the sad tendency there is to the *less*, in every good thing, instead of the "*more*." What cause have even good men to be indignant, incensed at their corrupt nature! The tendency obstinately is to wish the exaction were lighter,—to be ingenious in making out points of exemption,—to plead, not only the weakness of our nature, but even its very depravity,—to make a perverted use of the doctrine of divine assistance ;—the truth that we are nothing of ourselves, but that all is by the help of God, is alleged so as, virtually, to say, we do little because God does not enable us to do more, thus making it his fault! The tendency is, to magnify the little we do,—to take credit for what we intend to do,—to say we do more than some who profess as much.

Reverting to the disposition there is to contract the sphere of Christian obligation and action, let us recommend a consideration of the extent of what there is to be done. What may strictly be called a man's personal concern is a momentous affair ; but even this may suggest to him to look abroad,—to mind not his own things exclusively, but also the things of others. And look any way, every way round, his notice soon falls on something that should not be so,—should then be altered, if it can ; while it is so, there is mischief, — error, — depravity, — suffering ; there is something that needs to be supplied,—changed,—abolished, created. There is

the poison-tree that needs to be extirpated, and the tree of life planted ; there is the dark recess, where the heavenly lamp wants to be lighted. To think what work is to be done in coming times !—there is quite enough for every individual's share. And let not the Christian agent plead off on the ground that, on so vast a field any diminutive share that he can effect is just as nothing. The argument would come to this, that the more there is to be done, by the action of many individuals, the more excuse there is for each individual to do nothing. The truth is, this poor diminutive agent is not reconciled to his own dimensions ; he says he is *little*, yet is not willing to act unless he could do something to figure himself forth as *great*.

At the view of the immensity of things wanting to be done, there will sometimes arise a religious idea tending, unless guarded, to an irreligious feeling—“God could do it all with perfect facility, why does he not ?”—with somewhat of an unsubmissive and remonstrant sentiment. The plain, sole answer is, “We don't know why—it is a profound mystery.” But as plain it is that he commands his servants to work diligently, zealously,—and in faith that their “*labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*” And they are to look on “*others*,” for the purpose of gaining more definiteness to the conception and laws of their own vocation—“that standard is not for me,”—“that plan, those habits of life will not suit my work ”—“that self-indulgent indolence, what will my Master say ?”—“that conformity to the world,—in what company shall I be found at last ?”

Consider, where should we have been, (according to the ordinary instrumentality employed in the divine government,) if there had not been, in every age, persons to "*do more*," much more, "*than others?*" men to rise up in superiority and opposition to the general state of the world?—men to labour for God and a good cause with indefatigable resolution at all costs and hazards? if there had not been Wicliffs, Luthers, Knoxes,—in a later age, Whitefields and Wesleys? virtuous revolutionists and reformers in all departments? movers and executors of beneficent schemes? On a more limited and local scale, in many districts and neighbourhoods, the good people have to tell us, how some worthy and zealous man came thither, or came forward there, and was opposed, but persevered, gained co-operators, &c. Let us imagine, if we can, struck out of history, general or local, all that such men did, and caused to be done, "*more than others.*" It would give the idea of a world not worth keeping in existence.

Consider, again, how we talk of imitating excellent examples. But how are there to be any such? To recommend example, always supposes something superior, in its department, to the actual condition of those who are to imitate; also something marked, conspicuous, distinguishable from the rest of the class. It would be a mortifying reply from the persons so exhorted—"Imitate! Why, we don't see the superior excellence; they may as well imitate us, as we them." Who would direct a man inquiring the way through a country—"Notice a high ground,—a lofty spire,—a remarkable tree;" if he might

answer, "I *see* no hill, or spire, or remarkable tree?"

Observe, too, that the instant an example is set forth, the persons charged to imitate it will be critical and sharp in examining its claims to be one; if they can find flaws, they will; for it is no pleasant thing to be told that another is their superior; and if they are to imitate, they will be glad to do it on the easiest terms, and, therefore, to reduce the example as much as possible.

There may here be suggested an admonition to those who really do, in the right spirit, aspire to excel, to "*do more than others*"—not to be discouraged and deterred by the disposition that will show itself to depreciate, carp, misrepresent, and even obstruct. This has been the experience of all who have acted in the spirit of the high vocation. A deplorable characteristic of human nature! as if grieved that the race should not be wholly fallen! displeased at the proofs of its being capable of being a little lifted up from the degraded level!

But, now, the appeal is to those who are truly intent on compliance with the text. "You encounter all this;—did you reckon on the contrary? You are aggrieved by opposition,—imputations,—cavils,—misrepresentation,—ridicule,—satire. Now suppose, you surrendered your high purposes, and then received the tokens of a contrary feeling." One and another shall say,—"Well, I am glad you have given up your notion of being so much better than your neighbours; that you see no good in setting up for a Pharisee!" Another,—"Now we have you again!"

I *hoped* you would be cured, after a while, of the wild fancies that made you talk and act in that sort of fanatical way. You now see, rightly, that while we are in the world, we must do as the world does." Another,—“It's well for you that you are become prudent. I like all good things, in soberness and moderation ; but on your plan, you would have been aiming at a great deal that was needless, or ill-timed, or impracticable. You would have had people disliking and opposing you,—and *little thanks* from any quarter.”

The question is,—To those who are apt to be discouraged and deterred from “*doing more than others*,” would this be a gratifying sort of approbation and congratulation ? We used the expression “*little thanks*.” This will sometimes be experienced ; and there is need of great effort against its chilling and repressive influence. We must do the good thing for its own sake, or God's sake, not on any understood stipulation for a grateful return.

It is another consideration, requiring the most genuine motive, and the firmest resolution for “*doing more than others*,” that the obligation is enforced, and partly created, by the very fact that others do not what they ought ; that in compensation for their deficiency, their neglected or refused share is laid on those who will do the work ; so that it is very much in proportion as others do *less*, that they have to do “*more*.” If the others would come and take the shares that belong to them out of the hands of the faithful and overburdened workmen, it would be a relief, not as to the *quantity* alone, but the facility—

but they will not. They will not! and the bond-servants of God, who may be said in an honourable sense to be chained to their labour, look at them with regret, and sometimes with indignation. "That one has a degree of weight and influence in society, but he will not '*do more than others.*'" "That other has time on his hands, but he will rather trifle it away." "That other has talent, but he will exert it only to please or profit himself." "That other, again, has *money* in plenty, and accumulating. There are, within his view or knowledge, all forms of distress that might be relieved by it—but he is enclosed in the warmth of his prosperity, and does not care. There is one excellent design, and another, labouring in difficulty, perhaps from deficiency of that article; he could tell it out in sovereigns or notes, any day, and often, and not be sensibly the poorer. But no! Or if, for decorum's sake, he suffer a little to escape him, it will be no more than is expected from persons of far inferior means." Now, those who are under the compulsion of the text, are apt to murmur,— "Why are we made to make up for all these;—to work, as it were, for them?" The answer is, This is a wrong view; you are not working for them, but for God. It is the Great Master's business; and would *you* not do it to the utmost of your power, because they will not do it at all?

In all this affair of comparison with others, there is need to be warned respecting the principle, the motive, that is to impel to exceed them; and also respecting equity in the manner of making the comparison. It is a treacherous and unhappy circum-

stance of our nature, that there may be wrong motives to a right thing. It is eminently so in this matter of excelling others in good works;—such motives as vanity,—pride,—self-righteousness,—self-idolatry. The servants of Christ, then, in conforming to their Lord's requirement, are to beware of seeking to be admired, and praised, and set off in invidious comparison,—to be treated with great deference, &c. They are to beware of doing good in a jealous competition for distinction and honour;—of choosing with a special preference, and from a motive of vanity, those ways of doing good which confer the most notoriety, when there are much more obscure courses, less sounding operations, with no trumpet to proclaim them. There are some who, because they cannot do anything conspicuous, will do nothing.

When the corrupt motive turns to the religious side, when, after looking toward men, it looks towards God—there is self-righteousness—the Pharisee's catalogue (much improved upon) to be presented to the Almighty. “All thanks to Christ,—but we *will* have some merit of our own.” And for this purpose of self-merit a very high value is easily set on very moderate performances. This notion of self-merit is a most besetting nuisance; it comes in, like water, at every crevice. But how to avoid it? In the case put to Mr. Hall, (“You know, sir, self-righteousness is a great evil—a great sin.” “Certainly; what of that?” &c.) the poor man had two evils to contest with—covetousness and self-righteousness, playing into each other's hands; and saw no escape from between them, but by a quiet surrender to one of

them. He should have been told to fall fiercely on his covetousness, in the first place, for it was *that*, that supplied such hugely magnified pretensions to his self-righteousness; this would have greatly reduced the strength of the latter foe. Or he should have been told, finally, that if the case was to be left so, he must resign his profession of Christianity.

But, looking to this concern of motives,—what a grievous reflection it is,—what a melancholy view of our nature, that it is so difficult for it to be brought to the right action at all; and then so difficult to maintain the prevalence of the right motives. Oh! what a power of Divine Grace it does require! and also what need to keep habitually in sight, the sublime standard of perfection, to humble the estimate of all human excellence!

Just a word on equity in making the comparison, and we close.

“*More than others.*” Let there be a jealous watchfulness on the propensity to magnify *ours*, and to diminish *theirs*, in the comparison, according to the optical principle, that the one is close at hand, the other distant.

Again, the “*others*,” with whom the comparison is made, may have more difficulties than we are aware of, so that it may cost them more in exertion and sacrifice. Besides, they may do more good things than we know of.

Those of much larger means are not to consider themselves as doing “*more than others*,” unless they do more according to that proportion. There is heavy complaint on this matter in some religious connexions.

Another failure of equity is, when a man compares (if we may so express it) his *most* against another's *least*. "I perform, in this particular service, so much ; there is that other, he does little, if anything, in this way." It may be so ; but may be, also, that, in another way, equally worthy and valuable, he performs much, while, in *that* way, you do little ; and it may be beyond his ability to do both.

I would pointedly notice one, I believe, very common failure of equity in the comparative estimate of services ; I mean, the estimate set on tribute to a good cause in money, by those who can well afford it, as compared to what persons who cannot afford it, render in labour and valuable time. One has known persons (there are many such) not able to take any high rank in a list of subscriptions, but who have toiled patiently, and indefatigably, and gratuitously, month after month, and year after year, in various modes of exertion, to do good ; and yet, in the view of unthinking persons, this has stood for far less than a handsome donation of money. Not, assuredly, that we are depreciating pecuniary aids ; but our subject has turned on comparisons, and we plead for justice in the manner of making them.

To conclude ; let us seriously lay to heart the condition under which our Lord has placed his servants, amidst the inhabitants of this earth. He himself, when on earth, did "*more*" than all the other inhabitants, beyond all terms and measures of comparison. When he ceased to be visibly present, his cause, his work, his affairs, devolved on the agency of such as

should be willing to take on them the highest vocation under the sun. That vocation is disclaimed, practically, by an awful proportion of the world's inhabitants. They, therefore, who assume it are pledged (sworn) to do what the others will not. And let them consider how the time, the season, hastens away. Opportunities come, and are gone! It is a pensive, a mournful contemplation, to imagine the feelings of a man, late in life, looking back with profound regret. With what force, then, may the admonition be pressed on those in early life, to consider, deliberately, in what way and degree, *different* from a multitude of those around them, they will wish to have been.

Let the faithful maintainers of the distinction presented by their Lord, look to the sublime reward,—
“ Well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things ; I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

LECTURE XXXII.

INEFFICACIOUS CONVICTIONS.

ROMANS vii. 18.

“ To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not.”

It is no part of our present design to examine the doctrine running through this and the connected chapters ; nor even to ascertain under what precise relation the words of the text were spoken. It may be true that the apostle was personating a man, and describing the state and feelings of a man, under the bondage of the Jewish law, as contradistinguished to the freedom of the gospel. It can, however, be no less true, that he might and would have uttered these very words concerning himself, in a certain degree of their most obvious direct meaning.

But it must have been a distressing consciousness, a humiliating confession, in whatever degree he had to make it. How much he wished the case to be otherwise ! Adam did not more fervently wish it possible to go back into Paradise and innocence.

But we have sometimes heard confessions, in something like the same terms, made in a very different spirit. Confessions that certainly there is something very wrong with us ; that the mind is much out of order for the most important concerns and the highest duties ; that it is very unfortunate it should be so ; but, then, there is no helping it ; we are as God made us ; it is the common condition of mankind. And there is an easily returning indifference about it, just as if not thinking about it were as good as a remedy for it ; just as if an evil ceased to be an evil in proportion to its desperate strength.

Now, it would be possible to think of modes of admonition fit to be addressed to persons even in a state of mind like this. There is something or other to be said to man as long as he has reason. But, at present, it is a very different state of mind that we have in view, as the subject of some serious considerations. Let us describe it. You will acknowledge it to be no imaginary picture, as thus :—a clear apprehension and constant conviction of the judgment, as to the importance of certain great concerns, and the necessity of a serious attention to them,—both the grand, general concern of religion, and certain special concerns, part of the comprehensive one,—certain important duties and interests. An earnest desire, often felt, and always approved, that these great concerns were duly attended to. But, still, they are not ! that is to say, in any such manner as it is felt they ought. Many years since they were not duly attended to ; last year they were not ; they are not now. Some fatal prevention lies heavy on the active

powers, like the incubus in a dream. Again, and again, without end, the monitory, the reproachful conviction returns upon the man ; and he wishes, and resolves, and, perhaps, attempts. He, sometimes, thinks, "Surely now it is going to be !" But, still, nothing is done ! He almost execrates his own perverse nature, and the world in which he is placed. "I am under the curse of being quite another creature than I should have been,—I am a thing that wants to be dissolved, and made again." He wishes some mighty force might come upon him,—that an iron hand would drag him from his position, unfix him from where he stands like Lot's wife. He would be almost willing, at some times, to be terrified by awful signs, portentous phenomena. "I am willing that the ground should tremble under my feet ; that the spirits of the dead should haunt and accost me,—nay, almost, that the Devil himself should glare upon me. It were better I should sometimes see him with his terrors now, than continually hereafter. But, vain fancies and wishes ! all remains unmoved. Nature is quiet. Spirits of the dead do not encounter me ! The grand enemy has *other* modes of being near me ! and, alas ! *I* remain unmoved ! And yet, all this while, there is no essential impossibility in what I am wanting and desiring. Here is my soul with all the powers and faculties. The whole matter is but, that these should be actuated aright. '*O wretched man that I am,*' under the weight of '*the body of this death !*'"

How comes so deplorable a condition of a being "*made a little lower than the angels ?*" It comes

of the disorder and ruination of our nature. What is the disorder, the ruination of anything, but its being reduced to a state that frustrates the purpose of its existence, be it a machine, a building, or an animal? Then, look here at the state of mind we are describing! A man that feels, as he ought, this state,—oh! what contempt he must needs entertain for any theory that *denies* this ruination! unless he is to regard himself as a peculiar case, and no specimen. “Here, in a moral sense,” he may say, “here are wheels that will not turn,—springs without elasticity,—levers that break in the application of their force; and you tell me there is no radical fault in the state of the machinery!” “One thing is clear, that I can never learn, from instructors like you, how to have the miserable disorder rectified. You know too little about mankind,—about yourselves,—about the great standard.”

But, to proceed to our purpose. A man, conscious of, and lamenting such a state of mind,—*What shall he do?* Shall he absolve himself from all duty respecting it? Leave it as it is, without an exertion? Soothe himself into a stupid contentment? Resign himself to despair? Infallibly the time must come, when he will feel that this was not the way. No; he has a solemn work to do, and he must think of means. But here, perhaps, some one puts the question, “What class, precisely, are you addressing,—saints or sinners,—the converted or unconverted?” Our answer is, we are addressing no class, but those that the description fits, and in whatever degree it fits. We do all honour to the divine work of conver-

sion, by acknowledging that it introduces a new and quite foreign principle into the mind ; that it is the *germ of a new nature*, constituting there a spiritual vitality. But, then, (in a multitude of cases at least,) how very partial is its prevalence ! So that, to a lamentable degree, the state of disorder remains. Have you not had a sense of extreme absurdity, in hearing or reading some religious teachers, representing two classes as complete antipodes, without regard to discrimination and *degrees* ? Let a carnal, unconverted man be described, and the character consists of the whole account of human depravity. But let them describe a converted man, and there is just the entire reverse. But where is the man that will dare to produce himself as this complete reverse ? Indeed, is there, according to such a description, a converted man on earth ? We may appeal to the experience and conscience of many of those who hope and believe they are the subjects of divine grace. Some of the points of this appeal, conformably to the previous description, would be,—Have they not often to lament a hateful coldness toward divine objects,—a slowness to duty,—criminal delay,—strong opposing principles and impulses ? Then, let them not act the Pharisee ; but be willing to stand on the general ground with their fellow sinners, to meet the appropriate admonitions. There is one good thing, at the least, in all those fellow sinners, whose condition we are contemplating,—that they are deeply dissatisfied with that condition. It is so that conversion must begin, and we will hope that, in many cases, it is that beginning. To them, we would say,

Cherish this dissatisfaction—this grief; *be thankful that you are unhappy*. But, then, apply yourselves, with all diligence, to obtain a remedy. But, in what way? Look at the evil in view—the inefficacy of conviction—this practical refusal of the mind to be constrained. Its general cause and its strength are, the prevalence of the depravity of our nature. The adequate remedy must be no less comprehensive and fundamental; and is to be earnestly sought.

But, to take a more special view of the case;—the immediate cause of this inefficacy—this incompetency of our convictions and our best wishes and resolutions is, that the *motives* are not strong enough. It is obvious as daylight, but yet to be strongly insisted on, that it is by motives the mind must be actuated. To talk of free-will, in the most absolute sense, would be the grossest of all absurdities—a mere self-impulse. Hence, the importance of our being placed under the power of right motives and strong ones. And hence, then, the importance of *seeking* to have them. “But, then, we must, to begin with, have a motive to that.” The answer is, We want to be under a constant, mighty, driving power of good motives. And, at every moment, there are those things which *should* be all the motives we want; or should be their soul and strength. This may be the reflection of a man who feels as if half turned into stone,—“There is, all this while, what should put me into life and action.” As sometimes a man, in a long continued bodily malady, thinks—nay, not only so, but in this mental atrophy, the man can see what would,—“Now, that is the proper motive to

such a good thing, and that to such another ; and there, again, are what should be the motives equally to all good things. Oh, now, if these considerations were acting mightily upon me,—this,—and that,—ten times more strongly,—a hundred times more strongly. And if they *all* together did ! that would do ! And they should—they deserve—yet they *do* not. Oh, *why* do they not ? Let them ! Spirit of God, make them !” When a mariner suffers a long, dead calm on the ocean, how oft he looks up at the sails, and says, “Oh, if the winds would but blow !” Now, there may be persons who will aver, that the thoughtful man can do no more respecting his motives than the mariner respecting the winds. We must think differently ; and wish to inquire what practicable means he may find for strengthening the operation of good motives upon his mind. We are always supposing him honestly, and even earnestly, desirous of this effect. Then, what means do really lie within the reach and rational exercise of his power ? Or shall he wait quietly to see whether the good motives will grow stronger of themselves ? As we may look at a stream, and know that when the rain comes, it will be swollen to a torrent ; as we may let trees alone, and see how they will enlarge. Alas ! have his good motives grown while he *has* thus waited ? How many springs have gone by, while the trees have grown larger and stronger ! To the means, then ! And, the sovereign expedient for all good purposes, and especially those regarding the highest interest, is to implore the application of divine power. This is not to be lost sight of a mo-

ment. But this, as most important, may be placed last. And, first of all, the whole matter is quite hopeless unless we can effectually resolve to exercise serious, frequent, patient *thought*. Thought is the sole medium through which motives can come in contact with the mind, whencesoever they may come, as light is required for objects to come to the eye. We must deeply think what it is that all the great motives are required for. *What* in us,—for us,—by us? How, in time past, the failure has been. In what manner the mind has frustrated the force of the considerations that should have compelled it. And what would render them effectual. The probable and certain consequences of the continued inefficacy of our convictions. The solemn duty of looking about for means. Oh, the perverseness of evading such subjects of reflection! Oh, the folly of letting such a concern alone! This serious thinking will tend, (and it is one great purpose and use of it,) to render luminously distinct and prominent in our view, those grand considerations which ought to constitute our chief motives. Then, next, these being decidedly marked out and acknowledged, it should be our study and systematic endeavour to aggravate the force of those considerations, in all ways. “There is something that needs to be reinforced. It should be so to-day.” We should watch for anything to be added to their power,—seize on everything that can be thrown into the scale, any reflection, emotion, instruction, impression, that is applicable. Say, “This belongs here, to the general motives which should govern me, or to this

particular one." It should be a study to apply and appropriate these applicable things to this important use.

Observe, here, how this does take place, without any such care and voluntary effort, in the case of a motive which falls in with our natural inclination. The motive, then, of itself, as by an instinct for its good, catches all these things that serve to strengthen it. If a man could compare the force of it at two distant periods, he might wonder, how it had grown so much, since he never took any pains it should. Without our care it avails itself of each casual thought,—each passing impression; like a wild animal of the forest, that needs no formal provision.

Observe, too, among mankind, how fast, how dreadfully so, the very worst motives may grow upon a man, and he never intend it! Oh! not such the condition of the good ones!

But, besides this general vigilance to seize and apply anything that may offer itself, there must be a direct, earnest study and effort to bring upon the mind the impressions most adapted. And how? Obviously, by an effort of serious thought to bring before the mind those subjects, those truths, those realities, which are adapted to make the right impressions;—to bring them as close to the mind as possible;—and with frequent and persevering repetition. And here we appeal to the man who laments in the language of the text, and say,—“Cannot you do *this*?”

And let us observe to him, further, that,—if he is sincere in his professions of grief and good desire,

he will be willing to sustain a *painful* repetition of these applications. And if he feels, at any time, a strong impression made, so that the motive takes hold of him, oh let him be earnest that it may be retained and prolonged ! There are moments when thoughts strike and fix, when the aspects of solemn things are unveiled. It should be unnecessary to admonish him, here, that he is to be anxious and careful to debar the influences that give force to the opposite motives. And, for what those are, let him consult his experience.

In connexion with this, it may be worth suggesting, that it will be well, by an exercise of thought, to endeavour, in any case, to *combine* several motives,—all the motives—that work the same way, that tend to the same effect. There is one inducement applicable to the duty ; but there is also another, and another. But take special care of admitting an evil or doubtful principle into this combination—which does mischief in another way, though it do, in mere point of fact, assist to the good purpose in view ; a possible case, and of which the corruption of the heart will not fail to take advantage. Revenge may work to the same point as pure justice ; but here the companionship of the bad will vitiate the good ; as if a well disposed person were to go even to a place of religious worship in amicable companionship with a very depraved and malignant one.

The idea of combining good motives, leads to a further and important point, namely—that each good motive must, to be of any essential value, be part of

a whole, general system of such motives. There must be a vital circulation of the holy principles through the whole soul. The single part cannot by itself have pulsation, and warmth, and life. The one actuating principle will be surrounded by a multitude of others; and if it be a holy one, and they are hostile, it will soon be overwhelmed by them, and perish. “*What hast thou to do here?*” It must be supported by its like on the right hand and the left, or it will infallibly be cut down.

Let it be added, that our concern respecting the influence of motives upon us, is to be directed to this indispensable point—that the highest, the noblest, may have the chief power over us;—the love of God, the love of Christ,—the regard to eternity,—the desire of heaven. In other words, our grand business respecting motives is the earnest cultivation of general, vital religion. This alone can put them in that system and general combination we spoke of. This alone can put conscience into them, in the strict sense of the word. This alone can make them look solemnly to hereafter,—and short of this, how worthless are they! And that such sublime considerations may command us, may be our predominant motives, shall we not account worthy of all earnestness, — all prayer, — all practicable discipline? And shall we not be glad and thankful that there is a practicable discipline, under the divine agency and help? It is a bad sign when this is depreciated.

One of the expedients in this our self-discipline (for reinforcing our languid motives) will be, to

dwell often on the most instructive and impressive examples. And also there are many affecting scenes and events applicable to the principles that should move us; (the death of friends,—dreadful deaths, &c.)

Another obvious suggestion is, to choose, as far as lies within our choice, the society which furnishes the best incitements. And, then, as to influential circumstances generally. We are in a strange degree the creatures of circumstances; sadly so; because the greater proportion of them, by far, have a bad influence upon us. But, therefore, we should feel the more solicitude about this. In some cases, we can choose them. When it is so, let the consideration be, “What will probably be the influence on my actuating principles, as I choose thus, or so?” As to those respecting which we can have no choice, let us be intent upon deriving the utmost benefit from what is favourable in them; thus counteracting the influence of the unfavourable ones, and extracting good even from them. It is happy for some men that a beneficial force and impulse is put upon them by their connexion and occupation. (Methodist connexion.) In all such affairs we shall do well to pay attention to the natural constitution of our minds. A man who will observe, can perceive in what special and peculiar manner certain circumstances have an influence on him,—what it is that most tends to repress his better purposes. While touching on this topic we may just notice one kind of mental character, which is indeed less liable than others to be “moved” to evil, but on which it is

difficult for the good motives to be brought to act with power ;—we mean the mind of a natural disposition, cold, heavy, still, insensible. Motives work best, so to speak, in fire, that is, in the warmth and animation of the passions. Where these are faint, so will be the actuating principles. Therefore, an important admonition to persons partaking of such a natural state of mind is this,—where there is so little fire of the soul, let it not be wasted on trifling things ; but applied and consecrated, as much as possible, to give efficacy to the best principles. When there are barely combustibles enough for offering a sacrifice, it were sacrilege to take them away for baubles and amusements.

But do we talk of sacred fire ? There is fire enough in heaven for all our noblest uses ! And it can be had thence ! There are means of drawing it down. We want it as much as Elijah, when his altar and offering were all drenched in water. God has put into our hands that which will bring it down. And we must not close this subject without emphatically insisting, again, on the necessity of our using the greatest and mightiest of all means,—supplication to the Almighty. Our doing so or not, is the very test of our sincerity in the whole concern. It can be no “*godly sorrow*” that we are professing, if it does not direct and impel us to God for help. We believe that the Almighty looks mercifully on the serious emotions of the soul ;—that he can impart to them any degree of power, compatible with the state of mortality. And he has promised the divine energy of his Holy Spirit to those that ask him. Then

what have we to say to him ? “ Oh ! infuse into these convictions, these motives—thine own omnipotence ! Here is a solemn consideration that glimmers in my mind—make it lighten !—Here are the motives which thou hast sent ; they come near me,—come around me, but seem not to touch me ;—there is surely something between ;—oh ! make them break in upon me, though it were as a storm ! Here is a languid, unavailing strife of the better principles against an overpowering force. Oh ! arm those principles with all that there is in heaven that belongs to them, and then my deadly oppressors will be drawn away ! Here is a wretched corrupted nature averse to thee and all that is good. Oh ! lay thy hand upon it, thy new-creating hand—and it will be for ever thine ! ”

We conclude by but repeating, how evident it is, at every step, that there *must* be, for this concern, a habit of serious thought, or all is in vain. It might have been made, as it were, a distinct lesson on each particular that has been suggested—“ This *can* be of no use, unless you will exercise consideration upon it.” It is—it is a hard task to think gravely, and for a considerable continuance, and a frequent repetition ; especially on subjects involving pain. But any degree of thought may suffice to show that such thinking is indispensable, in the concern we have been representing.

LECTURE XXXIII.

DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS.

JAMES i. 8.

“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

THE short contribution of the apostle James to the collection of sacred scriptures is exceedingly remarkable for the bold and prominent exposure of the principles of human nature, as brought out in its practical modes and aspects of exhibition. He gives us the impression of his intimately inspecting real men, by classes and individuals;—of his having, somewhat like Socrates, met them, arrested them, examined them near and close,—and shaped his descriptions, lessons, lectures, and reproofs, on what was palpably before his sight. And as this was done under the fresh and penetrating light of Christianity, and with a severe application of its principles, the judgments incomparably exceed, in rectitude, in radical exposure, and in authority, all heathen wisdom.

He is remarkable for the grave force of single strokes of description and censure. Our text

exhibits and condemns a character, in a very few words, with a directness and clearness which leave no doubt that he had been actually looking at such a man. And we may observe that, at that time, in the commencing contest of Christianity with the whole world of evil, such an equivocal, undecided, half-and-half man, if he made any pretensions to be for the cause of Christ, must have appeared a sadly ill-constructed creature. Of all things on earth, he would not do for a Christian. For *that* character and service a very different man indeed was wanted. But not *now*, neither, will this double-minded man be of any value to himself, to men, or to God.

Let us see whether the character thus briefly described in the text, may not admit of some useful illustration. And we would attempt it in the following order. *First*; (though it may be questioned whether this should be the first in order,) two or three general observations to show what a disadvantageous, what an unhappy state of mind it is. *Secondly*; a few particular exemplifications of it. *Thirdly*; a brief suggestion of the means of remedy.

First, we have to observe on the miserable disadvantage, inefficiency, and, we may say, worthlessness, of such a state of mind for anything great and good. “*Double-minded*,” “*unstable in all*” things. The words instantly convey the idea of a man disabled in the exercise of his powers,—whose principles are undecided,—who has no steady aim,—whose purposes are confused,—whose efforts have not the consistency and perseverance to be availing. “*Un-*

stable as water, he shall not excel." A man, "*between two opinions,*" must "*halt.*"

Now, connect this with the consideration of the feebleness of the human powers at the best. Let those powers be in their best order, and exerted in the most steady, constant, and consistent manner possible,—and even *then*,—how slow and toilsome is the progress to any good,—what a labour to overcome difficulties,—what unsuccessfulness, and repetition of efforts,—how little, comparatively, accomplished, in acquiring any personal improvement, or in effecting social good. The most vigorous have mourned and been mortified, to see how little they had done ; the most determined servants of God have confessed that they were "*unprofitable servants.*" Think of this, and then look at the man who expends his strength in frustrating his own exertions,—whose purposes and efforts do little more than counteract one another.

Again, connect the idea of this character with that of the shortness of life ; short, in the most protracted instances,—shorter still, in the far greater number. And how much of this inevitably consumed in little cares and occupations ! and, in many instances, in grievances, pains, and languor ! So that it is quite alarming to think how little space there is for the best exertions for the most important objects. But, then, what do we think of a state of the mind wholly unfit for any such exertions and purposes at all ? A man deliberating, devising, designing, and perplexing and confounding his designs, and life is still hastening on ;—prosecuting a purpose a little while,

—and then, hesitating, stopping, life still going on! abandoning his design, — returning on his steps, — life still going forward; — attempting a different thing, — defeated again, — life still going; — trying to combine several things which cannot coalesce, — the result a failure, — yet life going on; — for a while spiritless for everything, — life all the while passing away. Oh! if he could but *see* time hastening away!

Think, again, what a dishonour and ignominy it is, for a man to be thus, as it were, his own opponent and frustrator. There is enough to oppose him, — to cross him, — to obstruct him, from *without*, were he ever so vigorously prepared for the great operations of duty. But he has *within* him the causes of defeat. He cannot put in order the active principles and powers within the citadel of his soul, to sally out in force against the external difficulties and opposition. He has there opinion dissenting from opinion, — motive disagreeing with motive, — passion conflicting with passion, — purpose thwarting purpose. A consciousness that he is powerless, and that if he attempt to act, he will accomplish nothing. It is justly that he has a sense of shame and self-contempt; for, how dishonourable a state is this, for a being who is summoned to the service of God, and the labours for immortality, — that he is so occupied and exhausted in a wretched strife in his own self, while the mighty enterprise is presented before him, — while zealous saints are prosecuting their career, — while the grand cause of all nature is incessantly proceeding, — while angels are all fulfilling their sublime vocations!

But, to carry the view outward ; this double-minded man, who has no simplicity and unity of purpose,—think how unfortunate is his case, on account of the diversity and multiplicity of things there will be to distract his purposes, and frustrate his exertions. In this “*double*” condition of mind, he is liable to be arrested by a great number of things on either side. He is put, as it were, in relation to more kinds of difficulty,—of doubt,—of temptation,—of delusion,—of apprehension. A man who has an unity of spirit and design, is soon aware what kind of things he has most to apprehend,—to beware of,—or to meet in opposition, and sees them straight before him. The man of divided spirit cannot know how much and variously he is exposed. He has, at the least, two men’s motives, dispositions, difficulties, and temptations, as if one man’s portion were not enough ! He might look at two persons of very diverse dispositions and pursuits, and say, “ Now I am *both you*, as to motives, desire of objects, and difficulties in the attainment of them, and, at the same time, I have not the single strength of either. Oh, that I *could* be the one or the other, and then I could prosecute a purpose, as each of you apart does. There is one class of objects presented to me,—attracts me,—commands me ; but when I think I am devoting myself that way, I find that another class, or another object, has seized hold of this other, this left-handed part of my nature, and is compelling me that way, and so I can go *no* way, but in a short movement soon to be drawn back.” Now, think of such a being in such a world as this ! In such wavering,—in such

instability of purpose and action, he is useless for his own advantage,—of no value for the good of men, nor for the service of God. And what a miserable account will he have to make of his life at its conclusion !

II. In the next place we should exemplify a little more particularly. But we may previously observe, that there are very many men exempt from this miserable weakness, by being the subjects of something still worse. There is many a sinner that betrays no double-mindedness. He is actuated wholly, steadily, constantly, by some one predominant evil. The man of all-grasping ambition,—the complete sensualist,—the insane lover of money. And these, in their way, are most worthy to be held up as examples, to those who profess to be, or to wish to be, devoted to better things. “Look at them,” we would say to the unstable, double-minded man, “*look at them, and be ashamed !*”

In representing the character of our text, in some of its most usual forms, we may note that there is perhaps some difference between a double-mindedness of variableness, fluctuation, fickleness, and that of inconsistency or self-contradiction. We have known persons of this former description, variable in principle and purpose,—and especially in regard to the greatest concern of all,—at one time, and for a while, in all appearance under the predominant power of most solemn convictions—seeming to feel the impressions of divinity and eternity—applying themselves to means and exercises of religion, lamenting their past neglect and irreligion—and uttering

emphatic vows for the future. But, after a while,—perhaps no long interval,—all this would be gone! What malignant influence had smitten them? What evil spirit had taken it all away? or what dreadful power of evil in their own spirits had awaked, after slumbering for a while?

But again, after another interval, the same order of thoughts and feeling has returned, with the addition of remorse. And to be succeeded yet once more, by the returning carelessness, and addiction to vanity and the world. A melancholy and mysterious spectacle, such a man! (We could name examples.) We need not dwell on the instability, which he will display in conduct. “What phenomenon is this?” the observer would say, “there is no calculating on his conduct; he is all one thing,—and then, next, he is all another!”

But we would rather direct the attention to that double-mindedness which endeavours, in the habitual course of life, to combine inconsistent, irreconcilable things. And how many exemplify this in the manner in which their minds are affected between the present and the future.

A predominance of regard to the great and endless future, is indispensable to the happy order of the human soul. But in some minds this concern rather harasses than predominates,—it cannot govern, but will not depart. And as it will not, it is attempted to be brought into some kind of compromise with the prevailing interest about the present objects. The soul gives itself, with its warmest passions, to these visible immediate objects,—these gratifications,—these advan-

tages,—these accommodations of present existence ; they occupy it,—please it,—would monopolize it. But no ! the awful images of futurity,—of eternity,—rise up to forbid that. There is the warning thought, “These present objects will soon be no longer mine—I must leave them ! and what will be the state of my soul elsewhere ?” And there is terrible authority in this thought. It forces its demand on the conscience of such a man. There must be some attention given to the concerns of future safety and final interests. There are, therefore, some serious thoughts ;—some employments of a religious kind ;—some abstinences and self-denials ;—under the impression of fear ;—some prayers, however formal and constrained ;—and vows, to make a much more full surrender some time ;—a kind of hope that this may suffice to prevent the final ruin, yet with dissatisfaction and apprehension. And this miserably interferes with and imbitters the interest of the present and temporal objects. Still ! the heart cannot,—*cannot* let these objects sink down to the subordinate rank, and admit the predominance of the grand future ones. This miserable double-mindedness disturbs and distracts the tenour of a man’s life. He goes on hesitating, embarrassed, impeded, and only succeeds in going wrong !

A man cannot really and effectually serve God and Mammon ; but some men do earnestly try to combine these two services. The particular import of that term “*Mammon*,” suggests one of these inconsistent combinations. There are men intent on wealth, covetous men, who yet endeavour to keep on

some terms with God and religion. It is true that when this is a passion thoroughly established, it is, perhaps, the most victorious of all, against any competition of religion. Still there are persons who wish to keep these two in some kind of junction. Their love of money predominates ; but it would seem as if they would consecrate the vice by some sort of adherence to the service of God. They cannot be willing to *perish* for this sin ! Therefore, they are punctual attendants on religious ordinances. They profess, and perhaps fancy they feel, a concern for the cause of God ; are admirers of gospel doctrines ;—can talk the whole range of evangelical language,—and exhibit much decency and regularity of conduct. And where then, in all this, is the disturbance, and clashing of the double-mindedness ? You'll soon see. That comes when the cause of God, the aid of religion, the claims of charity, demand or solicit some surrender of the beloved substance ; then begin the internal conflict and the opposite pleadings ;—the painful balancing,—the distress at the thought of parting ; then begin the excuses to conscience, and the anger at conscience itself if it will not admit them ;—then begin the evasions,—the casting all things on the all-sufficiency of Providence,—and all the contrivances of a disturbed mind to soothe itself. We need not repeat that this is where the evil passion has not taken entire possession of the mind,—for *then* there is nothing of all this internal disturbance,—there it is “*double-mindedness*” no longer. And there are instances to be found in which this fatal single-mindedness shall allow a man in

the delusion of being a self-satisfied professor of religion.

It is much the same thing, we have said already, when we exemplify the character, denominated in the text, in the case of a man who approves some great, general, good object, but is influenced by a selfish interest against it. He may acknowledge the thing in question to be really in a high degree desirable and important,—he has some good sympathies with it,—wishes it were in some way accomplished, provided it were with perfect impunity to him ; but its accomplishment, he apprehends, would involve a material sacrifice of his own individual private interest. This private interest rises up against all his convictions, and better wishes, and sympathies ; and determines him to oppose the thing he pronounces so good. But yet, not without a painful consciousness of inconsistency, which his utmost efforts cannot reconcile, and which gives a wavering, “*unstable*” character to his course of proceeding. See, again, the character in the text exemplified in the case of a man harassed between the dictates of his own judgment and conscience, on the one side, and the consideration of how he will be accounted of in the world, on the other side. That wretched servility to opinion!—how many wise convictions and excellent purposes has it frustrated ! The apprehended contempt of an ignorant multitude, or of the censure or scorn of those who bear a great sway in worldly society, the discountenance of fashion, the imputation of singularity, fanaticism, and other such things, it is marvellous what a power they

have against the best determinations of the mind. These had power to shame away from the society of heavenly wisdom and transcendent goodness, in the person of the Messiah, numbers of such as did really believe him the noblest inhabitant of the earth. And yet, when a man's judgment and conscience are deeply laid hold of, he cannot make this sacrifice to the world's opinion, without great and painful struggles, which will often make his conduct fluctuating and unsteady. "Whom am I offending, to please these? Is it the Supreme Judge?"

The attempted combination of things which cannot truly agree is exemplified in some, who wish to carry an appearance and a profession of belonging to the Christians, the people of God, and at the same time are very desirous of being on the most favourable terms with worldly and irreligious society. Thus they not only will regularly frequent religious assemblies, but will wish to hold a formal connexion with some Christian society, and to be accounted as religious,—would be offended at being adjudged not to be so. And it would seem that they really take some interest in religion. At the same time they allege that they have many points of obligatory and unavoidable connexion with the irreligious part of the community, and they see no good, they say, in rigour, precision, and puritanism,—and therefore, they must have liberty ("within the limits of innocence and propriety") to join them in many of their social habits, practices, amusements, when the Christian, that is, specifically and expressly such, may, for the

time, be laid aside. Now, that this *can* be done, habitually and on system, is very strange. If there *be* any genuine religious principle, there must often be a most uneasy internal consciousness—a sense of contrariety and unappeasable strife of feelings, a war between the two interests for the more complete possession of the man. And at all events there is, externally, a contradiction, a want of unity of character. It is “*instability in a man’s ways*,” with a witness, that the same person should at one time seek the communion of the faithful, employ himself in gravely reading the bible, join in social devotions, perhaps sometimes taking what may be called the active part in them,—and should, at the next turn, be found the voluntary associate, on the most free and easy terms, with the despisers of religion,—waste his precious time among them—join with them in what is no better than dissipation, in thoughtless gaieties and trifling amusements. Will he—will he pretend to plead that it recommends religion thus to show men that it has no austere and repulsive rigours? Alas! if he can fancy he is recommending religion by the very course in which he is betraying it! The lesson he actually gives to these companions is, either that they have as much religion as he, and therefore, they would presume, enough,—or that it is a thing which may be safely done without altogether.

You will easily see that all these forms of the “*double-minded*” character, are only shapes, a little varied, of the one grand inconsistency, the desire to preserve peace with conscience, and yet at the same

time to indulge the dispositions which conscience cannot approve. And as long as this inward strife and alternation of principles continues, it must forbid "*stability in a man's ways*,"—it must disturb the tenor of his conduct into uncertainty, variable-ness, and confusion.

We will only add to the description one more particular,—and that of a doctrinal reference. There seems to be in some persons a "*double-minded*" apprehension of the meritorious cause of human salvation,—a notion of some kind of distributive partition of the merit, between the sinful being himself and Jesus Christ. Now this must produce a painful perplexity and instability in a man's experience, and in his religious exercises and efforts. For it can never be adjusted, on each side, how much. If the Redeemer will not, of mere free favour, furnish *all* for justification, *where will he stop?* If I am to contribute essentially, meritoriously, myself, *what will suffice?* by what rule is it to be estimated? Will thus much, or so much, be enough? Have I what will be enough? Can I possibly do, can I bring to the divine justice, what will, as my part, be enough? And how shall I know? When can I be sure I am safe? I hope that Jesus Christ may in his bounty supply almost all,—*almost!* but what will the deficiency be? And can I add the deficient links to the golden chain, to connect it with my soul? What a melancholy "*strait between two!*" Unstable, therefore, is such a man in his feelings, in his efforts, in his prayers. Oh that human pride should be able to keep up the distraction of this perplexity!

III. There is no time for more than a very few words on the concluding part of the subject ; that is, what is the remedy for all this ?

The great thing to quell all this mischief, and conflict, and wretchedness, is to have one grand predominant sovereign purpose of life. And what can that be but to live for God and eternity ? How gloriously this would crush the hateful strife ! and bring us out free, in singleness of spirit, for the enterprise of immortality !

The means conducive, under the divine influence, to the establishment of this great predominant principle and power, are most plain and obvious. Let the man who feels the plague of this internal dissension, let him look most deliberately, most resolutely, and, as in the sight of God, at the motives, the objects, the interests, which divide and baffle his spirit ; and solemnly decide, what it is that deserves to have the ascendancy. And then, that which he sees does so deserve, let him consider what means there are to aggravate the force of its righteous demands, to give it more power over him—and to reduce the power of the opposing forces. Let him see what there is that he can apply to these convicted foes and traitors, to paralyze their grasp ;—whether there be not, in Heaven's own store of medicines, something by which he can poison the serpents ;—whether he cannot obtain a sacred fire, before which the foul fiends cannot stand. Let him look at those dead or living, who were or are, actuated by the noble simplicity and unity of purpose. Let him consider what he is both suffering and losing,—what is life worth in this con-

dition of internal disquietude and distraction? his soul the scene of a wretched conflict, at his expense—trodden down, as it were, under the strife, to decide whether he shall live for any purpose or not. And what he is losing all the while! losing the labour of his vital powers—spending his strength for nought;—losing his time,—the inestimable advantages for the attainment of the final good,—the present happiness he might be enjoying,—the benefits of the Redeemer's work,—the day of grace and salvation. Let him consider, (and be alarmed) — that the allowed continuance of this divided state of his mind,—of this conflicting, alternate actuation of the opposed principles—will be exceedingly likely to end in the decided final predominance of the worse! For the worse—they have human nature on their side,—the sad corruption,—the old man, constantly working for them;—they touch this native ground, and are strengthened afresh, like the fabled giant, whose powers in combat were continually renewed by contact with the earth, his parent. By continuance too, these worse contesting principles have *habit* on their side, the most infernal ally of evil principles, an angelic one of the good.

And lastly, as God is,—if we may speak so,—the supreme unity, simplicity, consistency, stability, in the universe, the soul must have a firm connexion with Him, so as to be in a humble sense (what we should not venture to express, if his own word had not) a "*partaker of the divine nature*," by his Spirit imparted, through the medium of the Redeemer. And then these opposing evil principles and powers

in the soul will shrink in the strife,—will no longer prevail, though they linger to struggle,—will have received the touch of death,—and will perish wholly and for ever when the spirit is at last set free from mortality and this infected world.

LECTURE XXXIV

THE POWERS OF THE WORLD TO COME

HEBREWS vi. 5.

“The powers of the world to come;”—

THAT is to say, belonging to, and operating from, that world which, as to us, is “*to come*,” though now existing. And by “*powers*,” we easily understand, forces,—energies,—agencies,—influences,—virtues,—and these in action upon their proper subjects.

Now, we are subjects to be acted upon. Our nature has almost its whole exercise, we might almost say, the verification of its existence—in being acted upon, by influences and impressions, from things extraneous to it. If our imagination could for an instant admit so fantastic, and indeed monstrous, an idea, as that of one human being existing, and nothing else, this idea could not stay before the mind. It would, in its very conception, be the idea of an existence immediately shrinking into nothing,—having no inherent sufficiency of existence to exist even for an instant. We easily conceive of the Divine Being existing in the eternal absence of all other existence; with nothing to

contribute to him, or act upon him. But all creatures must have their existence, as it were, substantiated to them, by means of something from without them. How many things are acting, how many causes are producing their effects, on *us*! Would they were all good ones! But it is alarming to reflect how far otherwise is the fact.

“*The powers of the world to come.*” There is one pure, salutary, beneficent order of influences, tending to work the absolute, supreme, eternal good of our nature. But it confounds the mind to reflect what proportion this class of influences bears to others, in the actual operation on mankind.

This world, too, has “*powers,*” which it exerts, we do not say in rivalry with the “*powers*” of the other, but with a fearful preponderance of efficacy. Behold the evidence of the mighty, extended, incessant, predominant operation of the powers of this world! Is it not as evident to our view, as the very face and colour of the earth, that incomparably a greater proportion of human spirit and character is conformed to *this* world than to the other?

But there may be persons to say, “And how should it be otherwise, seeing our relations to this world are so immediate, so many, and so essentially constituting our present condition, in which this world has the most peremptory and inevitable demands upon us? How can men but be conformed to what they are, by the necessity of their condition, so intimately and constantly implicated with?” The answer would be, certainly, that to a considerable extent, this is inevitable, and not wrong. There is a *body*,

composed of this world's elements, intimately involved in them, and depending on them ; through *this*, the present world *will* have a great effect on the spirit. The necessary care of temporal well-being keeps the soul in close communication with this world at innumerable points. The limitation of our direct sensible knowledge to this world, gives great power to the world's operation on us. Under such a constitution of our existence, this world has "*powers*" which will and must, to a considerable extent, assimilate the human spirit ; and to a considerable extent, they may, rightfully do so. But to what extent ? Is not that a most serious question ?

The answer would be obtained by means of one or two other plain questions, which a man should ask himself. For example ;—"Do this world's influences act upon me, *so*, that I habitually and practically forget the other world ? *so*, that I am reluctant even to think of the world to come as a personal concern ? *so*, that I feel that my sojourn here is really not answering the purpose of a preparation for that world to come ? *so*, that I am sensible, on reflection, that I am actually in a wrong state of mind for entering that world ? *so*, that I have not a decided, habitual, strong affection for the objects there ? *so*, that it is a gloomy thought, that I am constantly approaching that world ? *so*, that it would be alarming and terrible to receive a warning that I should very soon be there ?" Let conscience answer such plain questions of trial.

If these questions cannot be answered, in some degree satisfactorily, there should be a solemn move-

ment of alarm in the soul, to think under what unhappy dominion it is held a captive. Like a man, who, proceeding toward his distant home or country, finds himself, in his journey, circumvented, and arrested, and detained, by a band of men of malignant aspect, and dark and menacing purpose. To think! "Here is the brief, introductory portion of my existence,—yonder is its awful immensity; and I am engrossed, absorbed, by the little local concerns of this diminutive place! Here is the immortal spirit which belongs to heaven. I let it give its main, best energy of study, and care, and affection, and passion, to things which will concern me but for a few short years at the most. There is '*the world to come*,' actually approaching; I might perceive its signs,—feel its gale,—see its gleams,—hear its sounds,—be sensible of the vicinity of its spirits; and I am virtually saying, 'Let those omens retire! Keep back, thou mighty economy, and leave me undisturbed here, to my little world of trifles!' That '*world to come*' comprehends the sum, the perfection of everything, the sublimest, the best, the happiest. But what is it all to me? I feel no congeniality nor attraction."

But, is not this a lamentable and fearful state for the soul to be in? But, what is to be done? What, but to implore that "*the powers of the world to come*" may be brought upon us with irresistible force? and that we should make earnest efforts, if we may express it so, to place ourselves exposed to them? This is to be done in the way of directing the serious attention of the mind to that world. Let us fairly

make the trial—what agency, what influences, that world can convey upon us. The proof of its influential power has been displayed on very many, in effects the most salutary and noble.

One of these effects is, that it causes the unseen to predominate, in our minds, over what is seen ; the future over the present ; and these are great and admirable effects. From that world, come the influences to fix and keep us in one great sovereign purpose of life ; and *that*, a purpose high above all the mere interests of this world. From that world, comes the enlightening and active principle which, at once, exposes the nature of sin, and renders and keeps it odious to the soul. From that world, comes the supporting, animating power for endurance of the ills of life, and for overcoming the fear of death. In short, "*the powers of the world to come*" form the antagonist forces against the noxious operation of the influences of this world. And is not all this infinitely desirable and indispensable ? Look, how it fares with those who are going on through life under no such influences ! But, think how it fares with ourselves in proportion to the deficiency of them ! Well may the reflection often strike us, "If we had but more of those influences acting on us !"

Let us, sometimes, employ our thoughts on the qualities and circumstances of "*the powers of the world to come*." Consider, for example, they are influences emanating from objects and realities which preceded the very existence of this world, and will remain after it shall be demolished ; from God, and

Christ, and angels ; from eternity ; from everlasting truth ; from whatever region is that of the sublimest glory in the universe. They are forces of operation, from a source whence an awful energy of operation is extended to *the dark world of punishment*. Oh, how different an agency of power from that which we, here, may invoke and feel !

They are "*powers*" of influence which all the best beings conspire to send. For, even the departed saints are placed, as it were, in combination with God, the Mediator, and the angels, in sending a beneficent influence on us below ;—by their memory, —by their examples,—by their being displayed to our faith as in a blissful state above,—and, (we may believe,) by their kind regard and wishes for those below. And good and wise men have thought it not irrational to suppose that they may, sometimes, even be employed in real, actual ministries here on earth. These "*powers*" of the other world we are regarding chiefly under the character of influences, proceeding at the will of God, and conceived as exclusive of personal agency. But, far oftener than we suspect, there may be the interventions, though invisible, of such an agency.

All these "*powers*," these forces of influence, are sent, through the medium, and in virtue of the work, of the Médiator ; and bear in them a peculiar character, derived from him. These "*powers*," from the other world, are of such quality and force, that they can direct and compel, and combine, "*all things to work for good*." They are "*powers*" which attract toward where they come from ; which discipline, and

refine, and prepare, the soul, for its grand, future destiny, and to which it may surrender itself without reserve. They are "*powers*" which the spirit will exult in even the more, the more fully it is surrendered to them. They are "*powers*" from a world where our own great interest lies ; and operating, by means of faith, from a world of which the realities will, at length, be the objects of sight. They are "*powers*," which may be implored always, and may be obtained, to a very great degree of their efficacy ; no *ne plus ultra*. No one has so much grace, faith, spiritual strength, or victory over sin, and Satan, and himself, that he has no right to desire and petition more. No one is maintaining the opposition to the pernicious powers of this world, with such easy and complete success, that he does not, every day, need more of the energy derived from "*the world to come*."

Consider, how fast we are all advancing to go into another world. And who would not wish to enter it, with the very utmost advantage of having proceeded thither under the influence of its "*powers* ?" Who would not wish to arrive in the unveiled presence of the mighty realities with the delightful sense, that their influence had been mighty in preparing his spirit, as it were, to rush with rapture into the midst of their glory ?

February 10, 1825.

LECTURE XXXV.

ACCESS TO GOD.

HEBREWS xi. 6.

“He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

No saying is more common among us, or perhaps leaves a more transient impression, than that to approach to God, while enjoined as a duty, is also an eminent privilege. As no one thinks of questioning it, we easily let it pass, as if there needed no more but to assent to it.

That it can thus be an unmeaning sentence, a lifeless notion, indistinctly presented to the apprehension, and holding no communication with the affections, betrays that the soul is taking little account of its best resources for happiness. But such it will be, unless we can be serious enough for an exercise of thought, to apprehend as a great and interesting reality what we have so often allowed ourselves to hear, or to utter, as little more than an insignificant common-place of religious discourse. Can we be content it should be so? When it is understood that, among the things possible to man, is the very extraordinary one of “*coming to God*,” shall we not make

a faithful, earnest effort, that the thing so affirmed and believed may have to us all the effect of a reality, in being brought with clearness to our apprehension, and with power over our feelings ?

It is a wonderful idea, even as apprehended at once, in a single act of thought, without intermediate process of advancing from less to greater, in ascent towards the greatest—the idea of the infinite, almighty, eternal Being, as to be approached, and spoken to, and communicated with, by *man*. But a gradation of thought, a progressive rising towards the transcendent and supreme, might contribute to magnify the wonderfulness of the fact, of man daring and permitted to enter into a direct communication with God.—But by what order and train of ideas might we seek to advance towards the magnificence of the contemplation ?

If we might allow ourselves in such an imagination, as that the selected portion of all humanity, the very best and wisest persons on earth, were brought and combined into a permanent assembly, and invested with a sovereign authority—the highest wisdom, virtue, science, and power thus united—would not a perfectly free access for the humblest, poorest, most distressed, and otherwise friendless, to such an assemblage, with a certainty of their most kind and sedulous attention being given—of their constant *will* to render aid—of their wisdom and power being promptly exercised—would not this be deemed an inestimable privilege to all within the compass of such an empire ? Indeed, if such a thing might be, (an extravagantly wild imagination, we confess,) it would

take the place of Providence in the minds of the multitude, and be idolized.

But take a higher position, and suppose that there were such an economy that the most illustrious of the *departed saints* held the office of being practically, though unseen, patrons, protectors, assistants, guides, to men on earth ; that the spirits of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, could be drawn, by those who desired it, to a direct personal attention, and to an exercise of their benignity and interference—would not this appear a resource of incalculable value ? It is because it naturally would be so, that the Romish church was so successful in imposing on the people the fiction of such an economy as an undoubted reality, (and, indeed, paganism had before done something of a similar kind.) So gratifying, so consoling, so animating, has this imaginary privilege been felt by millions of that church, that their devotion has seemed actually to stop at this level of invisible existence ; the Almighty Father, and the Redeemer, comparatively forgotten.

But there is *another* far loftier ascension. We are informed of a glorious order of intelligences that have never dwelt in flesh ; many of whom may have enjoyed their existence from a remoteness of time surpassing what we can conceive of eternity ; with an immense expansion of being and powers ; with a perpetual augmentation of the goodness inspired by their Creator ; and exercising their virtues and unknown powers in appointed offices of beneficence throughout the system of unnumbered worlds. Would it not seem a pre-eminent privilege, if the

children of the dust might obtain a direct communication with them ; might invoke them, accost them, draw them to a fixed attention, and with a sensible evidence of their indulgent patience and celestial benignity ? Would not this seem an exaltation of felicity, throwing into shade everything that could be imagined to be derived to us from the benevolence and power of mortal or glorified humanity ?

Now, here we are at the summit of created existence ; and up to this sublime elevation we have none of these supposed privileges. No ! there is no such conjunction of the greatest virtue, wisdom, and power on earth. Departed saints have no appointment to hear our petitions ; and when we perceive, as it were, the distant radiance of an inconceivably nobler order of beings, it is with the consciousness that we cannot come into their sensible presence and recognition, cannot invoke their express attention, cannot lay hold on their power, cannot commit to them the momentous charge of our interests.

Thus we have ascended by degrees to the most illustrious of created beings, for the transient luxury of imagining what it would be to engage in our favour the intelligence, goodness, and power of those glorious spirits ; but to find ourselves hopelessly far off from such access. In the capacity of receiving our petitions, they exist not for us ; as to *that* object, these mighty agents are strangers to us.

What, then, to do next ? Next, our spirits have to raise their thoughts to an awful elevation above all subordinate existence in earth and heaven, in order to approach a presence where they *may* implore a

beneficent attention, and enter into a communication with Him who is uncreated and infinite ; a transition compared to which the distance from the inferior to the nobler, and then to the noblest of created beings, is reduced to nothing ; as one lofty eminence on an elevated mountain—and a higher—and the highest—but thence to the starry heavens !

But think, who is it that is thus to “*come to God ?*” Man ! little, feeble, mortal, fallen, sinful man ! He is, if we may speak in such language, to venture an act expressly to arrest the attention of that stupendous Being ; to signify, in the most direct manner, that he is by choice and design in that presence, intentionally to draw on himself the notice, the aspect of the Almighty. The purpose is, to speak to Him in a *personal manner* ; to detain Him in communication. The approaching petitioner is to utter thoughts, for God to admit them into *His* thoughts ! He would cause himself to be distinctly and individually listened to by a Being who is receiving the adoration of the most exalted spirits, and of all the holy intelligences in the universe ; by Him whose power is sustaining and governing all its regions and inhabitants. He seeks to cause *his words* to be listened to by Him whose *own words*, may be, at the very time, commanding new creations into existence.

But reflect, also, that it is an act to call the special attention of Him whose purity has a perfect perception of all that is evil, that is unholy, in the creature that approaches Him ; of Him whom the applicant is conscious he has not, to the utmost

of his faculties, adored or loved : alas ! the very contrary !

What a striking, what an amazing view is thus presented of the situation the unworthy mortal is placed in, the position which he presumes to take, in "*coming to God*." How surprising then it is, how alarming it well may be, to reflect on the manner in which, too often, we use this privilege ! What a miserably faint conception of the Sovereign Majesty ! A reverence so defective in solemnity, that it admits the intrusion of every trivial suggestion. Thoughts easily diverted away by the slightest casual association. An inanimate state of feeling, indifference, almost, in petitioning the greatest blessings, and deprecating the most fearful evils. So that, on serious reflection, the consciousness would be forced upon us, of its being too much to hope that such devotions can be accepted, such petitions granted.

To rebuke this irreligion, infesting and spoiling the very acts of religion, think again of the situation of such a creature as man coming into the immediate presence of the Divine Majesty. The very extremes of spiritual existence—the infinitely Most Glorious, and the lowest, meanest of all, brought into communication ; the absolutely holy, and the miserably depraved—the guilty. We may conceive that a creature of even such humble rank as man, if he were but perfectly innocent, might approach to a communication with the Eternal and Infinite Essence, though not without inexpressible awe, yet without terror ; but since he is impure and guilty, the idea of his "*coming to God*" would be no other than the image of a

perishable thing brought within the action of "*a consuming fire*;" the moral quality of the Divine Nature being in direct antipathy to that of such a creature approaching. Let a man, really and deeply affected with the debasement of his nature and his individual guilt, stand consciously before the all-perfect holiness of God; let him think what it must be to come in immediate *contact* (shall we say?) with that holiness; every look at his sinfulness, every secret accusation of his conscience, would fix and determine his attention to the Divine holiness—irresistibly so—rather than to any other attribute: for in all comparisons, even with our fellow men, our attention fixes the most strongly on that in which we are the most in contrast and antipathy with them, especially when the contrast presents something for us to fear. So with a creature consciously full of sin in immediate approach to Him who is "*glorious in holiness*," the attention would be arrested by that, as an opposite, a hostile, and a terrible quality; and the longer it were beheld, the more it would appear kindling and glowing into a consuming flame.

A sinful being immediately under the burning rays of Omnipotent Holiness! The idea is so fearful, that one might think it should be the most earnest, the most passionate desire of a human soul, that there should be some intervention to save it from the fatal predicament. No wonder, then, that the most devout men of every age of the Christian dispensation have welcomed with joy and gratitude the doctrine of a Mediator, manifested in the person of the Son of God, by whom the holiness of God

and the sinfulness of man are, as it were, *kept asunder*; and a happy communication can take place through the medium of One who stands before the Divine Majesty of Justice, in man's behalf, with a propitiation and a perfect righteousness.

Thus far, and too long, we have dwelt on the wonderfulness of the fact and the greatness of the privilege of "*coming to God*." We have to consider, a little, with *what faith* this is to be done. — "*Must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him*."

The fact of the Divine existence must be assumed by the seeker for permanent good. What a condition it were to be looking round and afar into boundless inanity in quest of it! uttering the importunate and plaintive cry, "*Who will show us any good?*" — directed first to poor fellow mortals, who can only respond in the same words; and then to the fantastic, shadowy creatures of imagination—nature, fortune, chance, good genii.

"*Must believe that he is*." Must have a most absolute conviction that there is one Being infinitely unlike and superior to all others; the sole Self-existent, All-comprehending, and All-powerful; a reality in such a sense that all other things are but precarious modes of being, subsisting simply in virtue of his will;—must pass through and beyond the sphere of sense, to have a spiritual sight of "*Him that is invisible*;" and, more than merely a principle held in the understanding, must verify the solemn reality in a vitally pervading sentiment of the soul.

And what a glory of intellect and faith thus to

possess a truth which is the sun in our mental sphere, the supreme itself of all lights, and whence radiate all the illuminations and felicities that can bless the rational creation! And what a casting down from heaven, as it may well be named,—what a spectacle of debasement and desolation is presented to us, when we behold the frightful phenomenon of a rational creature *disbelieving* a God! There are such men, who can look abroad on this amazing universe, and deny there is a supreme intelligent Cause and Director; and if some of these are possessed of extraordinary talent and knowledge, the fact may show what human reason is capable of, when rejecting, and rejected by, Divine influence; and we may presage the horrible amazement, when that truth respecting which the lights of science and the splendours of the sky have left them in the dark, shall at length suddenly burst on them!

“*He that cometh to God must believe that he is.*” But how easily it may be said, “We have that faith; we never denied or doubted that there is such a Being.” Well; but reflect, and ascertain in what degree the general tenor of your feelings, and your habits of life, have been different from what they might have been if you *had* disbelieved or doubted. The expression, “*coming to*” him, seems to tell something of a previous *distance*; see, then, what may have been, in a spiritual sense, the distance at which you have lived from him. Has it been the smallest at which a feeble, sinful creature must still necessarily be left, notwithstanding an earnest, persisting effort to approach him; or rather the

greatest that a mere notional acknowledgment of his existence would allow? What a wide allowance is that! and what a melancholy condition to have only such a faith concerning the most glorious and beneficent Object, as shall leave us contented to be so far off from him!

This belief cannot bring the soul in effectual approach to God, unless it be a penetrating conviction that the truth so believed is a truth of mightiest import; that, there being a God, we have to do with him every moment; that all will be wrong with us unless this awful reality command and occupy our spirits; that this faith must be the predominating authority over our course through the world, the determining consideration in our volitions and actions. When we say, then, that we have this belief, the grave question is, what does it do for us? Are we at a loss to tell what? Can we not verify to ourselves that we have this belief, in any other way than by repeating that we believe?

The effectual faith in the Divine existence always looks to consequences. In acknowledging each glorious attribute, it regards the aspect which it bears on the worshipper, inferring what will *therefore be* because *that is*. It is not a valid faith in the Divinity, as regarded in any of his attributes, till it excite the solicitous thought, "And what then?" *He is*, as supreme in goodness; and what then? Then, how precious is every assurance from himself that he is accessible to us. Then, is it not the truest insanity in the creation to be careless of his favour? Then, happy they, for ever happy, who obtain that favour,

by devoting themselves to seek it. Then, let us instantly and ardently proceed to act on the conviction that he is the "*rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*"

This actuating conviction must be decided and absolute in him that "*cometh to God.*" He must feel positively assured it will not be just the same to him, in the event of things, whether he diligently seek God or not. Without this, there cannot be a motive of force enough to draw or impel him to the spiritual enterprise. His soul will stagnate in a comfortless, hopeless, and almost atheistical inaction ; or, with a painful activity of imagination, he may picture forth forms of the good which such a being as the Almighty *could* do for him, and then see those visions depart as some vain creation of poetry ; or he may try to give to what keeps him afar from God a character of reason and philosophy, by perverted inferences from the unchangeableness of the Divine purposes, or the necessary course of things ; or he may pretend a pious dread of presuming to prescribe to the Sovereign Wisdom : all, in effect, terminating in the profane question, "*What profit shall we have if we pray to him ?*"

Without the assured belief that something of immense importance is depending on the alternative of rendering or withholding the homage of devout application, all aspiration is repressed, and we are left, as it were, prone on the earth. We are to hold it for certain, that, even though divers events, simply as facts, may be the same in either case, yet something involved in them, and in the effect of the whole

series of events, will be infinitely different. In each opportune season for coming to God by supplication, at each repetition of the gracious invitations to do so, at each admonition of conscience, there is a voice which tells him that something most invaluable would, *really would*, be gained by sincere, earnest, and constant application. He should say to himself, I am not to remain inactive, as if just waiting to see what will come to pass, like a man expecting the rain or sunshine which he can do nothing to bring on his meadow or garden. If God be true, there is something to be granted to such application, that *will not* be granted without it. As to the particular order of providential dispensation, I can know nothing of the Divine purposes ; but, as to the general scope, I do know perfectly that one thing is in God's determination, namely, *to fulfil his promises*. By a humble, faithful, persevering importunity of prayer in the name of Christ, I have an assured hold upon,—or, by a neglect of it, I let loose from my grasp and hope,—all those things which he has promised to such prayer. I am, then, assured he is the “*rewarder*,” inasmuch as I know *it will not be all the same to me whether I seek him or not*. And here we may instantly break through all speculative sophistry, by appealing to any man who believes anything of revelation : “Do you really believe that it will not, in the final result, and even in this world too, make a vast difference whether you shall or shall not be habitually, through life, an earnest applicant for the Divine blessing ? Answer this question ; answer it to yourself, from your inmost conviction.”

Let it be observed here, that, God having indicated by his precepts the way in which, conditionally, he will manifest his goodness to men, that way, as so set forth, must be the best. It is not, therefore, a mere dictate of sovereign authority, but a wise adjustment of the means for men's happiness. His goodness is not greater in his willingness to confer his favours, than in the appointment *how* they shall be conferred ; that is, the preceptive rule according to which we are to expect them.

That preceptive rule is conspicuous throughout the Bible. That we should "*seek God*," in the way of unceasing application for his mercies, is inculcated and reiterated in every form of cogent expression. Then we are justly required to believe, confidently, that as this is the very best and only expedient, God will combine the happiness of his servants with their faithful observance of an injunction *intended* for their happiness ; that it will be attended by tokens of the Divine complacency ; that in keeping the precept there will be "*great reward*." Like Enoch, they will have "*this testimony, that they pleased God*."

"*Must believe that he is the rewarder*." This faith is required in consideration of the intention, (might we presume to say, reverently, the sincerity ?) of the heavenly Father in calling men to come to him. "*I have not said, Seek ye me in vain*." To what purpose are they thus required to make his favour the object of their eternal aspiration ; to forego all things rather than this ; to renounce, for this, everything which it is the perverted tendency of the human soul to prefer ; to say, "*Whom have I in*

heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee ?" Why invited to give their affections, devote their life, and their very existence, to acknowledge their dependence and testify their confidence by unceasing petitions, and to strive fervently to obtain a more intimate access to him ? Why thus summoned, and trained, and exercised, to a lofty ambition far above the world ? Not to frustrate all this labour, not to disappoint them of the felicity to which they continually aspire ! They "*must believe that he is a rewarder ;*" that he is not thus calling and constraining them up a long, laborious ascent, only that they may behold his glorious throne, come near to his blissful paradise, do him homage at its gate, and then be shut out.

Consider again : it is because there is a Mediator, that sinful men presume, and are authorised, to approach to God, seeking that—no more than that—which the mysterious appointment was made, in Divine justice and mercy, for the purpose of conferring on them. Then they *must* believe, that this glorious office cannot but be availing to their success. There is a peculiar virtue in such a special, remedial interposition to secure its own infallible efficacy, since it was expressly because the original constitution of our nature had failed, and must remain powerless and hopeless for happiness, that this special and extraordinary one was brought into existence ; and an expedient which has been adopted, in the Divine government, to accomplish an end for which all else has been proved incompetent, must have a special and peculiar sufficiency for that end.

What has been appointed, in the last resort, in substitution and in remedy of an antecedent economy, because that has failed, must be, by eminence, of a nature not *itself* to fail. It rises up conspicuous and impregnable when all around has sunk in ruin ; like some mighty rock brought up into the light, and standing high in immoveable stability, in the rending and subsidence of the ground by earthquake.

They that "*come to God*" in confidence on this new Divine constitution, will find that he, in justice to his appointment of a Mediator, will grant what is promised and sought in *virtue of it* ; in other words, will be a "*rewarder*" for Christ's sake. And what is that in which it will be verified to them "*that he is a rewarder ?*" For *what* will they have to adore and bless him as such ? For the grandest benefits which even He can impart—can impart in doing full justice to the infinite merits of the appointed Redeemer.—An inestimable privilege ! that those greatest blessings may be asked for, positively and specifically ; whereas the minor benefits are to be requested conditionally, and it is better that the applicants should *not* be certain of obtaining them. It is enough for their faith as to these, that an infinitely wiser judgment than theirs will be exercised in selecting, giving, withholding, adjusting.

But the important admonition, to be repeated here in concluding, is, that all this is for them "*that diligently seek ;*" so habitually, importunately, perseveringly, that it shall really, and in good faith, be made the primary concern of our life ; so that, while wishes and impulses to *obtain* are incessantly

springing and darting from the busy soul in divers directions, there shall still be one predominant impulse directed towards heaven. And, if such representations as we have been looking at be true, think—(it is truly a most striking reflection,)—think what *might* be obtained by all of us, who have them at this hour soliciting our attention, on the supposition that we all should henceforward be earnest applicants to the Sovereign Rewarder. Think of the mighty amount of good, in time and eternity, as our collective wealth; and of the value of every individual share.

We said, “on the supposition;” but why are we to admit a word so ominous? for while, on the one side, it points to a grand sum of good, with an averment of Him who has it to give that it may be ours, it darkly intimates, on the other, that possibly it *may not*, may never be ours; that we may practically *consent that it shall not*. But *may* we, believing such things all the while, may we really so consent? With such treasure held forth in our view, and for our attainment, by the munificent Benefactor, and seeing some of our companions actually attaining it, can we consent to a melancholy destitution by foregoing it? Consent to forego! And to what is it that such consent would be yielded? Could it be to anything else than a malignant, dire, accursed perversity of our nature? No terms of execration are too intense for the noxious thing, within our own selves, that stupifies our affections and our will to the madness of telling our God, in effect, that we can do without his rewards; that he may confer them where they are

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more desired ; while we will look on and see others take them all away, content to retain and cherish in their stead that deadly enemy within, which compels us to let them go.

Can we *not* be so content ? Then, finally, what we have the most urgent cause to seek Him for is, that he will deliver us from that which keeps us from him. We have to implore—"O merciful Power ! abolish whatever it is that would detain us at a fatal distance from thee. Let the breath of thy Spirit consume the unbelief, the reluctance, the indifference, the world's enchantments, that would fix us under the doom to '*behold thee, but not nigh.*' Apply to these averse or heedless spirits such a blessed compulsion as shall not leave it even possible for us to be within reach of the sovereign good, and yet linger till all be lost."

And if, by unwearied seeking, we obtain this, it will, emphatically, be a "*reward*" for which all under the sun might be gladly given away.



